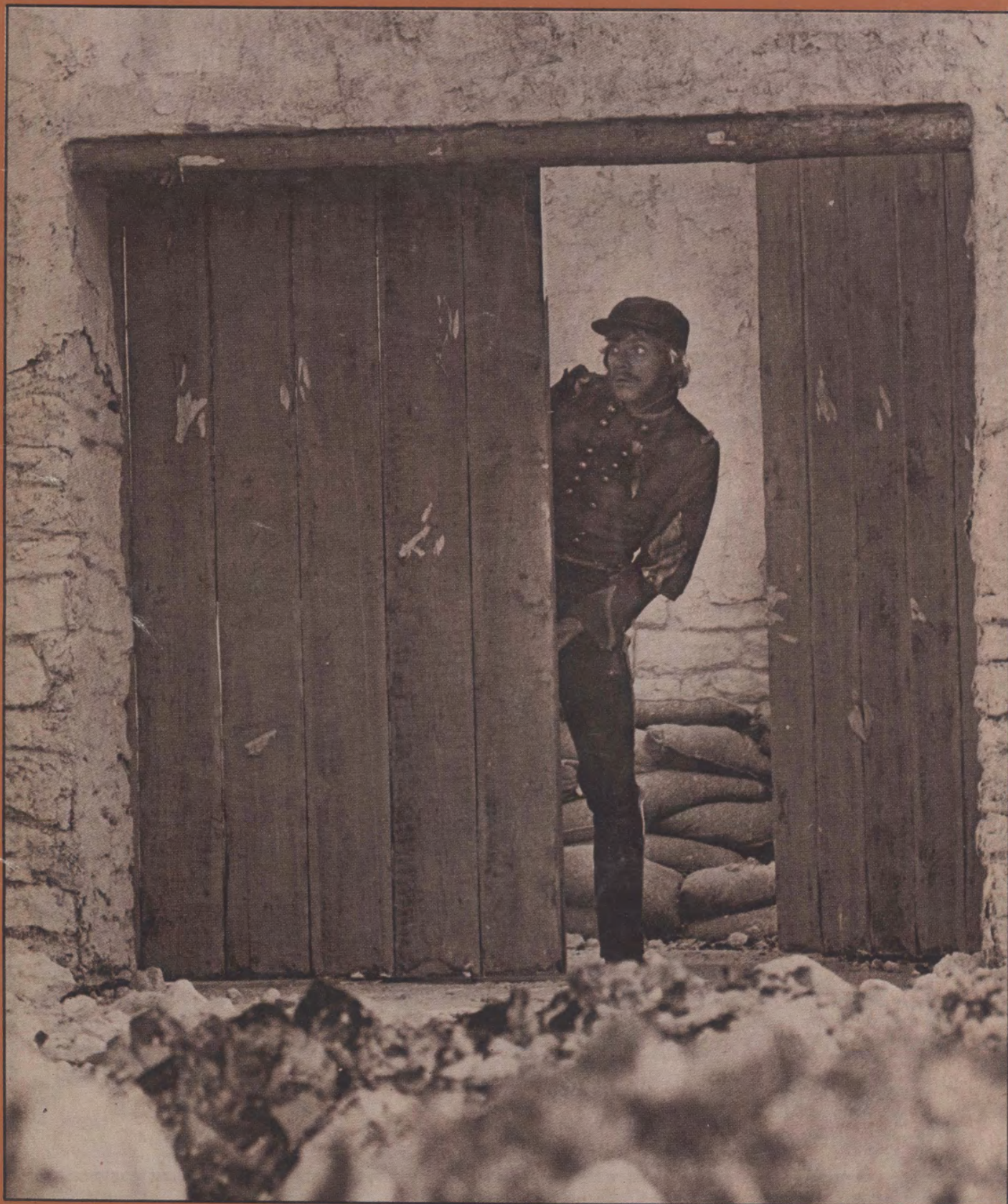




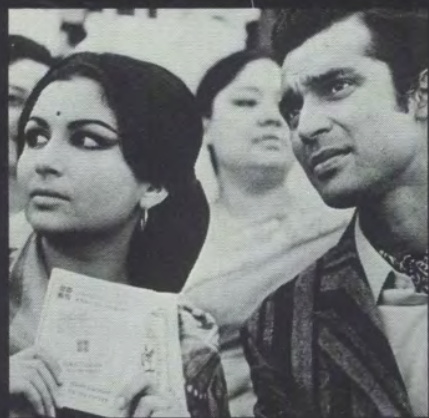
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SPRING 1975

Volume 44 No. 2

SIGHT AND SOUND

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GEORGES FRANJU:

Tom
Milne

THE HAUNTED VOID

'L'Homme sans visage': Jacques Champreux



This interview was recorded just before the screenings of *L'Homme sans visage* at the 1974 London Festival. Since I had not yet seen the film, the opening paragraphs are more by way of a formal statement than a conversation, which explains the subsequent change in tone.

The focal point of what followed, perhaps not immediately apparent since so much of Franju's admiration for Cocteau goes without saying, was my feeling—in one sense denied but in another confirmed—that Cocteau is much more present in Franju's work than simply as the author of *Thomas l'Imposteur*. The fleeting echoes of *Orphée* in *La Tête contre les murs* might be dismissed as coincidence; but in *Les Yeux sans visage* these echoes become hallucinatingly exact. To cite only two examples: as Valli drives a victim back to Brasseur's laboratory (stalking her prey by car, in black plastic mac and headscarf, she is Cocteau's Death and her motorcycle aides rolled into one) she pauses at a level crossing which uncannily recalls the entry into La Zone in *Orphée*; when Edith Scob finally ventures into the laboratory to discover the horrors that will ignite her rebellion, she first opens the double doors separating it from the garage (suggesting the folding wings of *Orphée's* mirror), and then glides effortlessly and without apparent movement like *Orphée* on his way to his last encounter with Death.

'What can one dreamer make of another?' He can share his dreams.

I have always been attracted by emanations of strangeness; in other words, by the *insolite*. I suppose this is why my films so often belong to the genre formally but somewhat loosely categorised by the term 'cinéma fantastique'. Within this rather nebulous area, I distinguish three zones: *le cinéma fantastique*, properly speaking; *le cinéma de l'insolite*; and *le cinéma de l'angoisse*. The *fantastique* lies in the form; the *insolite*, in the atmosphere; the *angoisse*, in the uncertainty, the unknown. The *fantastique* must be created; the *insolite* should emerge; and the *angoisse*, be felt. It seems to me that the *insolite* which particularly attracts me is expressed by infusing an affective image with a significance that is felt but whose

meaning is not perceived. In which case we are talking about the dramatic realism of the *insolite*. And *L'Homme sans visage*, which is a film *insolite*, is not realistic, while its dramatic aspects have nothing to do with the fact that it is *insolite*. Then how does the *insolite* manifest itself in this film? It springs, surely, from elements calculated to clash with each other—action and oneirism, divertissement and drama, a situation defying analysis and any attempt to pigeonhole its atmosphere. *L'Homme sans visage* is a purely fictional adventure story, a chimeric action spectacle, a dramatic divertissement.

The man in the crimson mask, known as the Man Without a Face, is a multifarious theatrical character. He creates characters for himself, and he is himself a composite creation. His appearances are tailored both to the ingeniousness, extravagance and deliberate naivety of the action and to his own behaviour. The character he presents is exaggerated, a collection of histrionic attitudes. He does not play his part, he plays with it. From sign to meaning: his style is one with the story and its expression. Hence, since realism alone can really be said to be the bearer of drama, the role of humour in this very dramatic tale; the humour which is, I hope—together with the *insolite*—the keynote of a nocturnal film peopled by somnambulists and activated by a man of such delightfully murderous intent.

I wanted to create a spectacle, by which I mean a film deriving from a visual aesthetic, in which malevolence and humour would co-exist in perfect harmony. A spectacle in which the dreamlike action would be 'ruthlessly' punctuated by two realistic and cruel scenes, since it is salutary to remember that you cannot laugh everything away. The cinematic image is gifted with twin powers: the power of psychological insight and the power of attraction or fascination. As a spectacle, *L'Homme sans visage* exercises the latter, and should therefore be approached rather like those carnival sideshows which require you to rediscover your innocence.

This quest for fascination is a fascinating business. Fascination implies a certain resistance, but also an awareness, in the person being fascinated. The attraction of evil. It has nothing to do with seduction, which implies a set purpose, though it is there in the fascination a woman exercises for men.

Fantastique and Insolite

The *fantastique* in *Les Yeux sans visage* is the surgical operation . . . because the *fantastique* must be created. The *insolite* lies in the character played by Pierre Brasseur. If an abnormal character does something abnormal, that's quite normal and therefore not frightening. But Brasseur's Dr. Genessier isn't in the least terrifying, he loves his daughter, he's a very kind person; and when an apparently normal person like that does abnormal things, then it's abnormal and it is frightening. When I say that the *insolite* emerges . . . I remember an incident when I was filming the scene in *Les Yeux sans visage* where Brasseur comes to the morgue to identify a dead girl who may be his daughter. I was shooting from a high window, looking down on an empty, quite uninteresting courtyard, waiting for his arrival. We rehearsed it, and the first time the car stopped

too near the edge of the frame. I had it come in a bit further, and then I shot the scene; I felt there was a touch of strangeness about the car's arrival, that it boded something or other. But when I saw the shot after my editor had assembled it into a rough cut, I simply couldn't understand it: there was no *insolite* any more, absolutely nothing. So I decided to reshoot the scene in the hope of recapturing whatever it was I had felt. I stood there looking down, with the camera trained on the empty courtyard, counting to myself, 'One, two, three . . .' Suddenly I yelled, the car drove in, and bang! there it was.

Because the simple fact of holding on the

But there may be a connection between *L'Homme sans visage* and *Fantômas*. After all, both arch-criminals like to keep their faces hidden behind their hooded masks, and my scriptwriter Jacques Champreux (who is Louis Feuillade's grandson) has never disguised his affection for *Fantômas*, the Master of Terror. But if there is a connection, it isn't with Feuillade but with Souvestre and Allain. People say 'Feuillade' because they haven't read the original, the thirty-two volumes of diabolic invention and bloody murder written by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain. The outrageously blood-thirsty crimes committed by *Fantômas* are never actually shown by Feuillade, whose



Echoes of 'Orphée': Edith Scob in 'Les Yeux sans visage'

empty courtyard for those five seconds made the spectator think to himself, well, if he's so insistent about it, he must have a reason. What reason? There's the uncertainty, the unknown. And just then the car comes into frame. And since the car was a veritable apparition, it boded something. It was bringing a message; and since the scene took place at the morgue, it must be a messenger of death. But on another level, of course, it boded nothing since there was no message whatsoever.

Feuillade, Souvestre and Allain

There is really no connection between *L'Homme sans visage* and the version of *Judex* I made in 1963. *Judex* is in black and white, with a particular concern for orthochromatic effects; *L'Homme sans visage* is in colour. *Judex* is set in 1914, with Modernist décors; *L'Homme sans visage* is contemporary and modern. *Judex* is a film *fantastique*, sentimental and melodramatic; in *L'Homme sans visage* there is no emotional conflict since there is no fluttering victim and therefore no melodrama, and its style derives not from the *fantastique* but the *insolite*. *Judex* is an avenger, an administrator of justice; the Man Without a Face is a criminal. *Judex* is a Manichean film where good triumphs; *L'Homme sans visage* shows evil triumphant and poised for a glorious future, though in an unrealistic guise which is therefore harmless and rather diverting.

qualities lie elsewhere; but the enthralling power of the novels lies precisely in their sadistic invention, the teeming violence, the spectacularly extreme cruelty.

In point of fact I don't give a damn about Feuillade, and personally I don't think I have been influenced by him. I didn't see Feuillade's *Fantômas* until I was about thirty, whereas I was brought up on Souvestre and Allain. Like Jacques Champreux, who had read *Fantômas* long before seeing any of his grandfather's films, I read the Souvestre-Allain books when I was about fourteen. The amusing thing is that when we made *Judex*, Champreux and I had to go to Belgium, where the Cinémathèque had a copy of Feuillade's version. The French copies disappeared around 1925 and it hadn't been seen in France since. So unless they were in their seventies, it is hardly likely that any of those French critics who compared my film unfavourably with Feuillade's had actually seen the Feuillade version (though of course *Les Vampires* had been seen and was quite well known).

In Feuillade's version, to begin with, *Judex* has a brother—*Judex* being the intellectual one, and the brother being the sporting type. They are the sons of a banker who has been ruined by his former friend Favraux. Being ruined, he commits suicide; and being Corsican, his wife makes her two sons swear on their father's body to avenge him. The complete melodrama, as you see,



Melodrama on the rooftops in Franju's 'Judex'

and quite apart from the key role played by Jacqueline (Edith Scob) in my version, going in a very different direction. The one resemblance lies in the deliberate attempt to capture a photographic style. Anyhow, if you pursue this attempt to define a resemblance between *L'Homme sans visage* and *Fantômas*, you come up against a rather pleasing enigma: how can one Man Without a Face resemble another Man Without a Face?

The very special role played by the dogs and birds in my *Judex* is something else again from Feuillade. The dogs are guardian-avengers, like the ones in *Les Yeux sans visage*. If I had been able to use exteriors, I would undoubtedly have introduced elements like that into *L'Homme sans visage*. I shot the film in Yugoslavia in some lovely sets; but although the Yugoslavs are good, solid constructors, in matters artistic they are hopeless. All the backgrounds were so badly painted that I simply had to avoid windows. The result was that I returned to Paris with an almost completed film and not a single exterior. Not a single window, even, whereas my films are usually full of them. The film was therefore completely claustrophobic. I did shoot some exteriors in Paris—or rather, continuity shots of scenes seen through windows—but it wasn't the same thing. What I mean is that while I was shooting I couldn't see what was there outside; so when I shot what was outside, I was no longer *inside*. I couldn't establish the same sense of windows opening on to something outside. The film has an entirely different feeling because of the way it was shot. It's very artificial. There are exteriors because people go outside, but it evolves in subterranean tunnels, on rooftops at night, in trains. Animals, the natural world, have no place here.

Windows and the Haunted Void

When I talked about 'the haunted void' in an interview, it was really in connection with walls rather than windows. It all goes back to something which happened when I was seven years old and nearly drowned. I'd fallen into a river, and it really is true what they say about a drowning man: my whole past flashed before my eyes, my mother, my grandparents, at an incredible speed and

with incredible clarity. I went way, way back into my past—of course, being only seven, I hadn't far to go. So nowadays, when I think back, this episode serves as a sort of staging post, enabling me to reach memories much further back than the usual ones of being around seven years old. The point is that among those early memories was one that made a great impression on me: the destruction by fire of my grandfather's shop. What struck me particularly was the walls. All the interior had been destroyed. When you stood in front of the façade with its windows like empty eye sockets, you felt there was no longer anything behind it but you weren't *quite* sure. After all, you felt, it had been inhabited once. Seen from the side, a façade like that is uninteresting; and Greek or Roman ruins don't evoke the same feeling because they are historical ruins. But seen head on, with no depth to it, now uninhabited and uninhabitable, a hollow shell like that has an incredible feeling of strangeness about it. That's what I mean by *insolite*; not *fantastique*, but *insolite*. A void, but a haunted void. An emptiness that was once inhabited.

Windows are a way out, a hope. The track in to the window as the guests leave at the end of the ball scene at the beginning of *Thomas l'Imposteur* suggests, maybe, a touch of destiny: what are they going out to, where are they going? But in *Thérèse Desqueyroux* the windows suggest despair rather than hope. If you are inside looking out, a window means hope; if you are outside looking in, it's despair. I remember when I was recording Maurice Jarre's score for *Thérèse*—a theme for piano—I told him I wanted to have the piano very loud over an exterior shot of a stream. We would then pan round and see Thérèse in the house, coming to the window. We approach the window, and the piano diminishes in volume, gradually tapering away as the exterior recedes, until we are inside the room and the piano is no longer heard at all.

Jarre couldn't understand why I wanted that effect; he felt we should have done the exact opposite. The piano is essentially an indoor instrument, it belongs to the salon; so if you are inside a house you would naturally hear a piano on the soundtrack. But in the case of *Thérèse*, no one in the

house was actually playing a piano, so on a non-surrealist level the sound could quite legitimately be used surrealistically. To my mind a piano heard from outside is much more affecting than if you hear it played in a room; for one thing you can't see who is playing, so perhaps you imagine a beautiful, fragile girl—and if you do, the music swells all the more movingly. By reversing the usual process I think I captured the true meaning of that scene, giving an extraordinary sense of Thérèse's solitude. Taken together, music and image added up to one thing: incarceration.

The Art of Psychiatry

La Tête contre les murs is also about incarceration, and the accuracy or otherwise of the medical aspect didn't bother me at all. Actually it was Jean-Pierre Mocky who did the adaptation, not me, and he was faced by the problem that the hero of Hervé Bazin's novel was a repellent little swine. Since our main purpose was to demonstrate that his incarceration in an asylum was inhuman—however much he asked for or deserved it—we had to make him a more or less sympathetic hero. From there came the note of ambiguity in his character, whereas in the novel everything is cut and dried. Since we were also out to show the conflict between a young man and his very honourable, very upright, bourgeois family—in a sense the film might be described as a sort of pre-May 1968 contestation—we didn't need the whole epic story of his decline, which began in 1934 and continued through the Occupation, the Liberation, and so forth. There is a documentary aspect to Bazin's book, which is a sort of inquiry about evolving methods of treating madness. All that is elided in the film, which has a contemporary setting.

I am pretty well informed about psychiatry and psychoanalysis since I have been undergoing monthly analysis for years—I am a chronic depressive: if I don't work I'm down and if I do I'm up—and in my opinion psychoanalysis is not a science but an art. I remember when we were shooting scenes on location in Dr. Evrard's hospital for *La Tête contre les murs*, I was walking in the gardens one day with one of the doctors. Suddenly a patient went past, looked at us, and sniggered crazily: 'Evrard's Nazis! . . . heh! heh! heh!' I asked what was wrong with him, since he evidently took us for Nazis. 'Nothing,' I was told, 'in fact he's leaving us in two weeks' time.' Psychoanalysis is an aesthetic, a language, and not subject to any proofs. The psychoanalyst doesn't draw conclusions that are susceptible to proof; he stretches you out comfortably on a couch and makes you talk. By his presence, by virtue of his own virtue, he can in certain cases acquire a sort of magic power over a patient. As I said, it's an art, not a science. Did you know that in France, as I discovered recently, you could be a psychoanalyst without being a doctor? If it isn't an art, it is inconceivable that a person who must be considered sick could be placed in the care of someone who isn't medically qualified.

The Lure of Vertigo

Le Métro is a bagatelle of no consequence at all which I made with Henri Langlois in 1934, long before I really entered the film

industry. It was a sort of amateur thing, made for . . . no, not exactly for fun, because I found something fascinating about the Métro, something frightening and vertiginous, yet alluring. I realise now that in my short films, when I could choose the subject, I was always drawn to themes that I didn't want to touch because they frightened me. But since I had a conditioned response to the subjects, there was a good chance that I could condition the spectator to the same response, and thereby get through to him. I made *Le Métro* (and *La Première Nuit*) because the underground has always exercised a morbid fascination for me. *Le Sang des bêtes*, because I love animals; *Hôtel des Invalides*, because I am anti-militarist; *Notre Dame de Paris*, because I am anti-clerical and because I suffer dreadfully from vertigo. Despite my acute vertigo, I have made two films about the Eiffel Tower . . . and audiences get giddy watching them, too.

There is always a funereal side to my films, a sense of baleful, ceremonial ritual. Perhaps this explains the resemblances you find between my films and Cocteau's. As a matter of fact, I hadn't seen *Orphée* when I made *Les Yeux sans visage*. When the film

was finished I showed it to Cocteau, and he sent me a brilliant article he'd written about it called 'La Jeune Fille masquée' ('The Girl in the Mask'). He then invited me to see *Orphée*. Cocteau also wrote a remarkable article about *Le Sang des bêtes*; he was one of the few people who recognised the ceremonial of the film . . . the butchers in their shrouds, and so on. Did you know that the killing of animals is a sacred ritual among the Jews and Arabs? While making the film, I shot some footage of one of these ritual killings in the slaughterhouse at La Villette. In the end I didn't use it because it was too horrible; they don't kill the animals, they let them die. I remember that after I had shot the scene, the Arab hid his face away in his robe.

Zola, Mauriac and Proust

Zola thought of himself as a naturalistic writer. In fact he was a realist only insofar as, being a socialist and therefore a writer on social themes, he let reality encroach on him. But insofar as the realism of his work is concerned, he was a visionary. Above all, he was a poet: *Le Paradou*, the garden in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, is a practical

impossibility as he describes it, a figment of the imagination. I'm very fond of Zola, even though everyone seems to think of him as a poor writer. 'Zola writes badly,' they say, whereas 'Proust is a magnificent writer.' Stylistically, this is true: Proust's style, on a purely literary level, is admirable; and Zola's isn't. But I confess that for me—and I'm no literary fanatic; I like reading, but I suppose I'm more visually oriented—Proust's novels are a bore and Zola's are enormously exciting. For the very good reason that Proust's society bores me, while Zola's excites me, because something is stirring there: excitement, passion, lust for life. Proust is very cool and calculated, wandering about in his salons, observing and annotating. Zola wanders not in the salons but in a bourgeois society, a working class society, a suffering society, a sick society, an angry society, a society in revolt, and he becomes passionately involved with that revolt. It's a rare quality.

Mauriac, perhaps, comes somewhere between the two; but although he detested Zola, Mauriac is much closer to him than to Proust in the sense that, like Zola, he was a regional writer. And to my mind there is no doubt that regional writers make the greatest novelists because they describe provincial society and because provincial society—which is essentially a bourgeois society—doesn't change. Provincials stay put, they have a much more solid foundation, so there is less risk of becoming outmoded by fashion. Mauriac, who was a native of Bordeaux, wrote about precisely this sort of society: Thérèse Desqueyroux is the model *petite bourgeoise* from the provinces. Now, the difference between Cocteau and Mauriac is that whereas with Mauriac everything converges, with Cocteau it opens out. So much so, in fact, that I had no difficulty in adapting Mauriac; since the atmosphere converges to a point, it is easy to make the whole thing explode. With Cocteau, this is impossible. I can't go further than he did.

In *Thomas l'Imposteur*, for instance, you start with a character, the Princess de Bormes; you are told she is Polish and that people suspect her of being a spy, but you really know nothing about her. Then you are introduced to Thomas, who calls himself de Fontenoy, which isn't his real name; he's a liar and an impostor, and you know nothing about him either. They meet, set out in quest of life, find themselves in enemy territory, and it ends on the battlefield against the vast, dramatic backdrop of the war. Cocteau closes with an apotheosis which is the death of Thomas. What can I possibly do with that? In Mauriac, people suffer; in Cocteau, they dream. And as Cocteau said to me, 'What can one dreamer make of another? Nothing . . . he can die.'

With Mauriac, on the other hand, you have the land; and on the land, two houses, two families: Bernard, of the Desqueyroux family, and Thérèse, of the Larroque family. They marry, the two families become one, and everything converges on Thérèse. But in that one character there is an ambivalence. She is really two characters: Thérèse the *petite bourgeoise*, and the Thérèse who wants to change, who dreams of a more fulfilling way of life. And it is the clash between these two Thérèses which provokes her sense of revolt, her moral revolt. One without the other would be of no interest, and this is the



The uses of windows. Above: Théo Sarapo, Francine Bergé, Edith Scob in 'Judex'. Below: Emmanuèle Riva in 'Thérèse Desqueyroux'



strength of the regional writer: Thérèse is aware of her roots, of the bedrock beneath her, and it is this that convinces her that something positive may come from a rebellious nature.

Conrad and 'The Shadow Line'

Conrad is a magnificent writer. But we had terrible difficulties with *La Ligne d'ombre*, which I made for television. Initially, we were going to make the film on location, following Conrad's course to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Bangkok, and so on. Everyone assured me it would be marvellous and trouble-free, but just as I was about to go out there scouting locations, some sort of revolution broke out. The next suggestion was Spain, but I've never set foot in Spain since Franco's day. Morocco I agreed to, but we finally ended up using Nice for Bangkok and Villefranche for Singapore. So long as we remained ashore, it didn't look too bad, as I made do with Oriental banners and streamers and things; and we managed to find an old dockyard dating from about 1850—the wine market at Bercy, as a matter of fact—which stood in for the docks of Bangkok.

We also got hold of a fine-looking boat, a Panamanian brig which was laid up at Villefranche. We shot all the scenes we needed on deck and at last decided it was time to put to sea. Finally, after countering all sorts of excuses and delays, we set off. I looked around, and realised I'd seen the man at the helm before somewhere: it was the manager of the local pizzeria. Then it dawned on me that the sailors were all waiters from the same pizzeria. We got out of Villefranche harbour all right, and then the boat began to heave and pitch like crazy—not that the sea was rough, it was just that no one knew how to handle the boat.

I couldn't shoot a thing with the camera slewing all over the place, but eventually we made it to Cannes after suffering the humiliation of being towed in and—much to the amusement of the audience looking on—being put ashore knee-deep in spaghetti and tomatoes by the garbage-boat that cleans up after the yachts. When I got back to Paris

the film was finished but I didn't have a single shot taken at sea, so I had to go off to Italy and use another boat that bore no resemblance to the first. Oddly enough, neither Conrad nor the film really suffered from this limitation on the action, since it isn't a story about action but about inaction; it's about a boat which gets nowhere. *La Ligne d'ombre* is a meditation; the shadow line has nothing to do with the fog; it's the moment of hesitation in which a man determines his destiny. Conrad doesn't write adventure stories; he's a poet.

Henry James and Dumas fils

I don't know why I was never able to set up a film of *What Maisie Knew*. Perhaps because Henry James wasn't well known in France; it might be easier now for television. It's a marvellous book, and so full of love and drama that you would think it very much to the public taste: all those couples getting together, separating, rearranging themselves, not to mention the child—and children are always good box-office. The trouble is that they always say, yes, but about this Maisie, now who's she? And since there aren't any stars that age, they start thinking about the couples. Who will the star be . . . the father? The governess? And you land up with something just like every other movie. What attracted me, of course, was the ambiguity, the sense of troubled waters, malaise . . . and the whole thing seen through the eyes of the little girl. It's a little like Edith Scob in *Les Yeux sans visage*: artless, limpid innocence.

I never got as far as preparing a script for *What Maisie Knew*, but I did do one for the English market which never got off the ground either. It was after *Judex*. I received a letter from Nigel Gosling saying how much he had liked the film and how it had reminded him of Max Ernst, and inviting me to a performance of Frederick Ashton's ballet *Marguerite and Armand*, danced by Fonteyn and Nureyev. I came to London and saw the ballet, which I liked, but I couldn't see what they needed me for just to make a thirty-minute film of a thirty-

minute ballet. Trying to think of an alternative, I read the Dumas novel—which I'd never read before—and came up with an idea which might have been genuine Max Ernst. (*Judex* has nothing to do with Ernst: I imagine his name came up simply because of the man with the bird mask.) My idea was to turn it into a film-ballet by making it a collage, incorporating the ballet (suitably modified) into the novel so that its five parts would represent the love scenes. The script, which would have run to about 100 minutes, shifted constantly back and forth between real locations and stage sets.

Take, for example, the scene in the villa at Bougival where Marguerite leaves Armand. He's alone in the bedroom, it's raining, the settings are real. Time passes; he becomes increasingly upset, looks at the unmade bed; and she appears. He retreats with her and, now in a stage set, they dance; and at the moment when she faints, her head on the pillow becomes a camellia, all that is left to him of her. In despair, he rushes into the wings, and for the first time we see people in a stage box watching him. And what they see is Armand running through a garden in the rain, the street with traffic passing, Armand crying 'Marguerite!' Still in real locations, he arrives in Paris. In the rue de Rivoli he sees one window—Marguerite's—illuminated. He goes upstairs, opens a real door, and enters a stage salon. There, for insulting Marguerite, he is challenged to a duel, dances to the back of the stage and prepares to leave. As he reaches for the painted door-knob, a shot rings out. He turns. And we see his adversary, in a meadow at dawn, as Armand returns his fire. The collage effect, I think, might really have been something; but what with contracts and television and American interests, it was all too difficult to set up.

Another project I've been working on was a television treatment for an almost forgotten novel by Hoffmann, *The Princess Brambilla*. The trouble is that every time you look round, television has a new man at the top, and the first thing each new arrival does is to cancel everything his predecessor agreed to. So I'm waiting for the dust to settle. Since I always propose subjects that nobody wants anyway, I feel I might as well look for something really out of the way.

Adolf Schickelgrüber Lives

A delightful aside on *L'Homme sans visage* is the German reaction to the film. It ends with the fiendish criminal, his plans aborted, preparing to vanish into the landscape in his guise as an old lady who runs a haberdashery, when suddenly an equally ancient customer appears and asks if she will be back soon. 'Oh yes,' 'he' says, 'We'll be back soon, very soon.' I was sure English audiences would appreciate the pleasantry, but in Germany they said, yes, it's great, but I'm afraid you'll have to change the end. I couldn't understand it, and finally, after much humming and hawing, they explained: 'He'll have to be killed; you see, German audiences will see him as a Nazi symbol.' So for the German version I've killed him; a truly Wagnerian finale complete with Templars, music and all the rest of it. Too bad if the whole film now founders humourlessly into *Parsifal*. They asked for it . . .

'L'Homme sans visage': the shabby little shop in a Feuillade landscape is headquarters for the Man Without a Face



Every Man for Himself



Right: 1830 print of Kaspar Hauser; left: Bruno S. in Herzog's film



David L. Overbey

'When I get up, a buffalo gets up; when I walk, a buffalo walks!' Werner Herzog was joking about the physical development he felt in his legs after walking from Munich to Paris to arrange for the subtitling and Cannes Festival screening of his new film, *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*. An avid soccer player, Herzog can speak at authoritative length about the 'art', the 'sheer beauty of movement', of professional athletes. This intense interest in physical feeling and action extends to the conception he has of his films: 'I will continue to make films only as long as I am physically whole. Truly, if I were to lose a leg tomorrow, I would stop making films, even if my mind and all the rest were still solid. When we were making *Aguirre*, I knew how to shoot certain things only after I had helped to construct a raft and tried the rapids myself, to feel the currents in the Amazon. It is more than that, but difficult to explain. . .

'Look, I made a sports documentary for German television after I finished *Every Man for Himself*. I chose to work with a Swiss ski-jumper who did incredible things—jumping far past the limits which are considered possible without injury. Everything was working out well enough; the endless technical problems were solved; but still, for me, the film wasn't clear. Then one night the film crew, myself, and some others grabbed the skier, hoisted him on our shoulders and ran with him through the streets. His thigh was on my shoulder and I could feel the weight of him there. At that moment, the film suddenly came quite clear for me. And it came through this physical

sensation. I feel everything about the films I make physically. I like to carry the reels around and feel their weight. When we are shooting I sometimes even like to touch the film itself.'

Yet, save for such exceptions as the ski film—and even there it is a case of transcending the illusion of human limitation—Herzog usually explores subjects involving such 'limited' human beings as the blind and deaf, dwarfs, a hunchbacked warrior madman and, most recently, the mysterious 19th century foundling, Kaspar Hauser. 'Yes, that seems to be a constant idea. But you must understand that I am not a philosopher. I am not an intellectual. I

make films to rid myself of them, like ridding myself of a nightmare. There seem to be many broken people in my films, and much cruelty. But there is also a dignity which transcends the suffering. I don't make films about freaks. People either love or hate *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, but the dwarfs are not freaks, they are us. It is like a nightmare vision of the dwarf in each of us. People react to the film depending upon how they react to the dwarf in themselves.'

When asked about influences from other film-makers, Herzog smiled a bit ironically: 'Yes, of course, there *must* be influences, but I can't really help answer that question. For example, I did not grow up watching the great old German films. I didn't even know what expressionism was until about ten years ago, when I heard Lotte Eisner lecture in Berlin. Which, by the way, was also the first time I ever heard of Lotte Eisner, and I was captured by her magic and remembered that voice when I needed a narrator for *Fata Morgana*. I have since seen a lot of those films, but I look at them like anyone else and I can't really say they are influences on me. I feel a certain affinity for Murnau; much less for Lang and Pabst. I have liked certain films by men like Godard, but only those which are professional. By professional I don't mean just technically well made. Rather, professionalism in film is related to the work of the old artisans who worked on churches. I think of myself far more as artisan than as artist—a word I don't trust much. The artisan, after all, had a true feel for his material—which brings us back again to physical knowledge.'

If, then, there is no great affinity for the older German masters, what about the new German cinema? 'I am not a spokesman for the new German cinema; no one is. I feel in certain ways at the centre of things, but in another way I am something of a loner in German cinema. I have rarely shot a film in Germany, simply because I couldn't usually find the appropriate setting there. I don't know personally all the directors working there now. I've met Fassbinder, for instance, less than half a dozen times. I like some of his films very much; others less so. We work differently, of course. He has a more or less permanent company, and some of his films—the Sirk films for example—are composed of pictorial and dramatic elements which can be used quickly. I think one can look forward to good films from Reinhard Hauff, whose *Mathias Kneissl* I liked a good deal. I liked Fleishmann's *Hunting Scenes from Bavaria*.

'There are other good films and good directors in German cinema, but already many directors are moving off to make features only for television or are making films which are entirely commercial in concept, which means certain compromises must be made. Some like to eat good meat too much, perhaps, or have lost their fire. It is that creative fire which is important. That is why I have dedicated this latest film to Lotte Eisner, for she carried the fire out of Germany when things went dark and kept it alive.

'I can't say why there is so much film activity now in Germany; it is far too complex a question. I do think that it is different from the earlier movement in the



'Every Man for Himself': Bruno S., Brigitte Mira, Alfred Edel

silent days. Then it was part of a larger cultural activity, including painting, theatre and literature, with film more or less growing out of those. Now there is no such wide activity. German painting, for example, is nothing to speak of. I do think it will take a long time for Germany again to take its place fully and freely in international culture. I was in America, in the deep South, and I stopped for gasoline. I had a car with New Jersey licence plates, and the man at the station refused to sell me gas, saying "I don't have any gas for Yankees." I explained that I wasn't a Yankee, that I was a Kraut, and I got the gas. The point is that it is a hundred years since the American Civil War, but there is still that hatred, that closed attitude.

'Still, what is important to me is to keep making films. I sincerely don't care if Werner Herzog is well known. If, in America, they can sell *Aguirre* as a Klaus Kinski adventure film, fine. It is the film which is important. I am my own producer, and therefore free to make my own films. I can't think in terms of genre, for example. *Aguirre* may be within the adventure genre, but that was never a part of its conception. There are directors who can consciously work within genres and still make personal films; I just don't think of film in those terms. In part this may explain why I am poor. Money from foreign sales of films like *Aguirre* comes in, but it is never very much, certainly never much at any one time, and one can't plan to have enough that way for the next film. With the foreign sales of *Aguirre*, co-production money from ZDF and a prize of 200,000DM from the government for the script of *Every Man for Himself*, the 850,000DM budget for the film was raised.

'It is easier if one has enough money, obviously, and if, as with *Every Man for Himself*, the laboratories and other facilities are nearby. We had incredible difficulties with *Aguirre*. The footage had to be sent to laboratories in Mexico, and we were never sure exactly what we had. Retakes were impossible anyway. The sequence in which the river rises overnight and almost everything is swept away was written into the film only because that was what actually happened. We had to rebuild the rafts.

Word came back that a good deal of the film we had shot was lost somewhere in transit to Mexico, but we kept shooting and hoped. Later the 'lost' film was found sitting outside the customs shed in Mexico City. One night I had less than one mark in my pocket, and the next day we had to feed the entire cast and crew. Relationships became strained, and at one point I literally threatened to kill one of the actors if he didn't behave. I might have done it, too. You see, it finally isn't the money that makes the film, it is the fire.'

Although there have been novels and even a play—by Peter Handke—based on the story of Kaspar Hauser, Herzog's would seem to be the first film based on the story which Anaïs Nin described as 'far more beautiful than that of Christ . . . Never was the ugliness of the world more clearly depicted.' Herzog's own interpretation of the tale is not far from Nin's: 'The story of Kaspar Hauser deals with the sole known case in human history in which a man was "born" as an adult. Kaspar had been, as he later recalled, locked in a dark cellar for his whole life, and couldn't even recognise humans, for food was brought to him at night while he slept. He believed it a natural characteristic of his anatomy that he was tied to the ground with ropes and could only sit.

'Kaspar was, in the purest sense, a person without concepts, without language, an uncivilised person, a yet to be studied kind of human, an unrefined man, like someone from another planet. As Kaspar emerges suddenly and is thrust into the life of the philistine bourgeois, the passion for history develops in him, that slow deadening of what was spontaneously human in him. In the end, as Kaspar died, people searched desperately for some sort of deformity in him; that the deformation was in the bourgeois society to which he wanted to adjust himself was what they were all blind to.'

When Kaspar appears he can write only his name and can say only 'I would like to be the kind of horseman my father was,' although he is ignorant of its meaning. The phrase would seem to have historical reference to the contemporary gossip that he was the natural son of the Grand Duke

of Baden, but in the film it indicates more importantly his unthinking eagerness to conform to the rules of the society into which he is thrust. As he continues to learn, however, he begins to understand that his reality is not the same one shared by those around him: 'Don't you hear the horrible scream around us that is commonly called silence? The song of the people appears to me like a repulsive scream, and if the people stop screaming, the priests will start screaming in their place.' And finally, before he dies of a wound which is almost gratuitously inflicted by his mysterious gaoler, he despairs: 'Yes, it appears to me that my appearance on the Earth has become a cruel failure.'

Whose failure is not immediately clear. Although the film begins with an aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* asking 'Is love the answer?' and ends in the same aria with 'Yes, love is the answer,' this musical parenthesis cannot be denied a certain irony. 'Love' is, after all, the non-ironic solution given in several films which at first glance seem to parallel *Every Man for Himself*. In both Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage* and Penn's *The Miracle Worker*, it is assumed that 'love and patience' will bring salvation to the deprived children. Perhaps it is because they are children, however, that their salvation through education is never questioned. Both films end with the sentimental device of an educational 'break-through'—as if learning to say 'lait' and 'wawa' were enough. In neither film is the society, or the reality of that society as embodied in its language, ever really questioned.

It can hardly be an accident that, while both the wild child and Helen Keller learn to ask first for what is contained in their cups, Herzog's Kaspar learns the word 'empty' first when his cup is drained. This is not to suggest that it would have been better to leave Truffaut's boy in the darkness of his forest or Helen in her blindness, any more than Herzog would suggest that Kaspar's narrow cell was superior to the world he found outside; but simply that there is more to these tales than the assimilation of the beliefs of a middle-class society which leaves scant room for individual visions of reality, or for human dignity that has little to do with table manners. As Herzog's description of the story suggests, it is the very act of conformity which deforms the soul.

In depicting 'the ugliness of the world', Herzog is not content with lightly barbed slaps on the wrist such as can be obtained all too easily by the mere introduction of a 'savage' into 'civilised' society—*Tarzan's New York Adventure* will do—in which an easy target like Big Business might suffer a blow or two while no basic assumptions are questioned. *Every Man for Himself* is, to keep the Tarzan analogy for the moment, closer to the satiric thrust of that smiler with a knife Jaroslav Balik's *Tarzana Smrt*, in which the 'savage' must die when a corrupt society cannot cope with his honesty and innocence. In this light, Nin is penetratingly accurate in her suggestion of the parallel between Kaspar and Christ.

A series of obligatory scenes condensing several years of Kaspar's education mark the consecutive stages of his comprehension that the people around him are not the

inhabitants of Paradise. At first he is taught language, although he never speaks with the fluency which would indicate his full acceptance of the medium by which a hostile reality is described. These early scenes are shared either by Kaspar and children or by Kaspar and birds, beings with whom Kaspar shares his uncorrupted vision. Later, Kaspar is 'taught' the way the world is seen to work by his keepers and hosts. Examined by several ministers who insist that he confess to having had a 'natural' idea of God while in his cellar, he, in his honesty, cannot. While filled with righteous anger, the men of God 'charitably' allow him to repeat a prayer with them; if he cannot share their reality, he can at least learn the ritual which sustains it. During his examination by a professor of logic, Kaspar works out a problem in his own way, but the solution is rejected because 'it is not a logical answer.'

If religion and abstract logic are thus shown as empty systems in which the answers precede the questions, there remains that reasoned order of the world which begins with the 'objective' observation of phenomena. The key sequence, then, to Kaspar's 'education' comes with the lessons in natural history in which his benefactor Daumer uses apples for illustration. At the end of a long session, Kaspar suggests that they stop for the day 'as the apples must be tired.' Laughing at this 'misconception', Daumer explains that apples have no consciousness, and to prove his point tells Kaspar he will roll an apple on the ground and that it will stop when it hits the boot of his friend. Instead, the apple bumps over an uneven place in the path and jumps over the boot. 'Smart apple!' exclaims Kaspar. One is amused, of course (and Herzog says that audiences in German cinemas greet the scene with gales of laughter). But is one amused at Kaspar's naïve inability to grasp our usual division of the world into subject and object, or at Daumer (and ourselves?) in his inability to grasp Kaspar's reality?

Here one is confronted with Herzog's method: a cool, neutral observation of characters and events. If Truffaut and Penn insist on our identification with the teachers, and therefore their assumptions about the world, Herzog stays aloof from such an easy response to such a complex situation. The ministers and the professor are obviously disagreeable fools, but Daumer is both sympathetic and well-meaning. He opens his home to Kaspar and treats him well, even with affection and the sort of love given to bright pets. He is in no way wilfully destructive of Kaspar's 'human spontaneity', save that he is totally unable to question his own set assumptions in the face of Kaspar's legitimate questioning.

Still, the movement toward abstraction occurs only after seeing the film. We must remember Herzog's own statement ('I am not a philosopher. I have no system to illustrate'), and we must take it seriously. At only one point does Herzog move away from observation to the self-conscious creation of an abstract construct within the film, and it is this sequence which is at once the film's weakest and the one which sheds most light on Herzog's usual method. Kaspar is made to 'earn his keep' by appearing in a sideshow with other 'freaks' for the

edifying amusement of the townsfolk. As Kaspar has already 'progressed' beyond the catatonic state in which the townsfolk first saw him, he 'acts' for his employers by dressing in his earlier costume and reverting to his earlier state. In so far as Kaspar is later unable to 'act' successfully the role of educated ape for his adoptive father, Lord Stanhope, and his aristocratic friends at a coming-out party at which Kaspar is the debutant, his appearance at the country fair is re-enacted to make an abstract point about the exploitation of innocence.

That the scene is in the film to illustrate an abstract concept is further underscored by the presence of 'The Little King', the dwarf Helmut Döring from *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, and an actor playing Hom-brecito, the Indian flute player from *Aguirre*, two characters of dignity who share the freakshow spotlight with Kaspar. The scene makes its abstract point, as well as conceptually summarising Herzog's earlier work. This philosophical interlude, however, breaks up into a mad chase across the surrounding country as the 'freaks' attempt to escape, and we are once again in the world of sensation and Herzog's neutrally observed reality. Although the scene is in no way bad, or destructive of the ultimate reality which Herzog has created, it does momentarily run against the texture of the film and jolt the viewer to another level.

The beckoning landscape into which the sideshow attractions seek to escape is of prime importance to Herzog, who maintains that his first conception of a film is in terms of seeing a landscape: 'A story can take place only in one place, otherwise you have something different. I look for a place where a man can have dignity.' The town of Dinkelsbühl, with its surrounding farmlands, fields and small woods in mid-summer, is not only appropriate historically (Dinkelsbühl has not changed since the eighteenth century), but exactly appropriate in emotional and intellectual atmosphere. The farms, like the rooms of the town's houses, are modestly rich and smugly well-ordered, allowing the townsfolk and farmers to sink comfortably into their unquestioned notions of the way the world should work. At the same time the glittering, ordered

space, as seen from nearby hilltops, allows one to partake of some of the same sensations as Kaspar when he is first taken from his cell. Even the rippling fields of grey-green grass and the streams shadowed by overhanging trees with which the film begins prompt an ambivalent response that combines the possibilities of well-being with an undertone of the sinister. In this landscape a man might live fully, or might well be thrown from paradise by an inability to adapt to its dappled patterns.

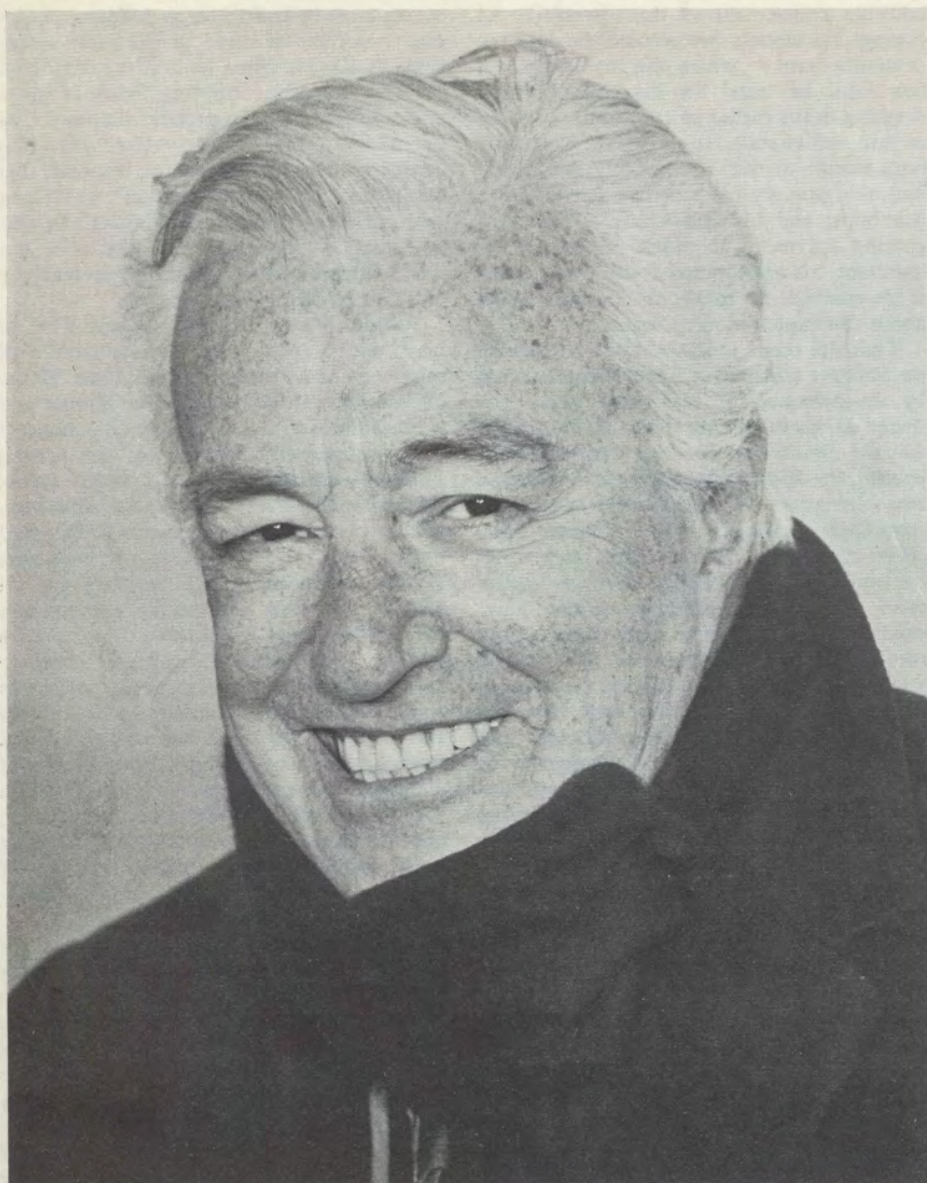
Within the town's cosy rooms lives at least one other fully sympathetic and relatively spontaneous being, Frau Käthe (Brigitte Mira). Käthe cares for Kaspar and accepts him on his own terms with none of the condescension shown by the others, Daumer included. In one short scene, Käthe pours coffee for the visiting ministers, after which she obviously wants to be asked to stay (to aid Kaspar?). When an invitation is not forthcoming, she hesitates for an instant, and then with subtle exasperation says: 'Well, then, I will leave the pot,' puts it down and reluctantly leaves. The whole business lasts only for seconds, yet it has about it the feel of spontaneous movement and understanding of the character and situation that goes far beyond the delivery of dialogue. Partially, this is a matter of the very texture of the actress's face and manner, but the casting of Mira and the sequence itself shed light on Herzog's method of shooting.

Although the script for *Every Man for Himself* was completed with all the dialogue for its presentation to the authorities to qualify for the prize of 200,000DM, Herzog prefers that the actors know only the story and situations. Each scene's dialogue is given to them just before it is shot. 'If you rehearse the actors you lose spontaneity. I will shoot a scene once or twice. If it does not work then, something is wrong with the dialogue or action, and I will change it—even at times cutting whole scenes when it appears they won't play easily.' He casts actors as much by their physical appearance, their texture, as for any other reason. Brigitte Mira, for instance, would never have been cast had he not seen her first in Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul*. Afterwards, when the film was under way, he saw photographs from her earlier musical comedy days: 'I told her that had I seen those photographs she would never have been in the film. I couldn't believe it was the same person; the photos were insipid, quite unlike her. Now she has escaped all that and has a whole new career, one that she deserves.'

The performance of Mira notwithstanding, the glowing centre of the film is Bruno S as Kaspar. Part of his story has already been filmed in Lutz Eisholz's *Bruno der Schwarze*, in which Bruno recalls his thirteen years spent in orphanages, reform schools and homes for the mentally subnormal. Herzog has been able to tap Bruno's private world to nourish the inner life and exterior manner of Kaspar. His presence in the film gives unshakeable strength to the director's belief that, history aside, the story of Kaspar does not have to end in the death of spontaneity, and that in spite of all, the human spirit can not only endure but triumph.

'Every Man for Himself': Helmut Döring

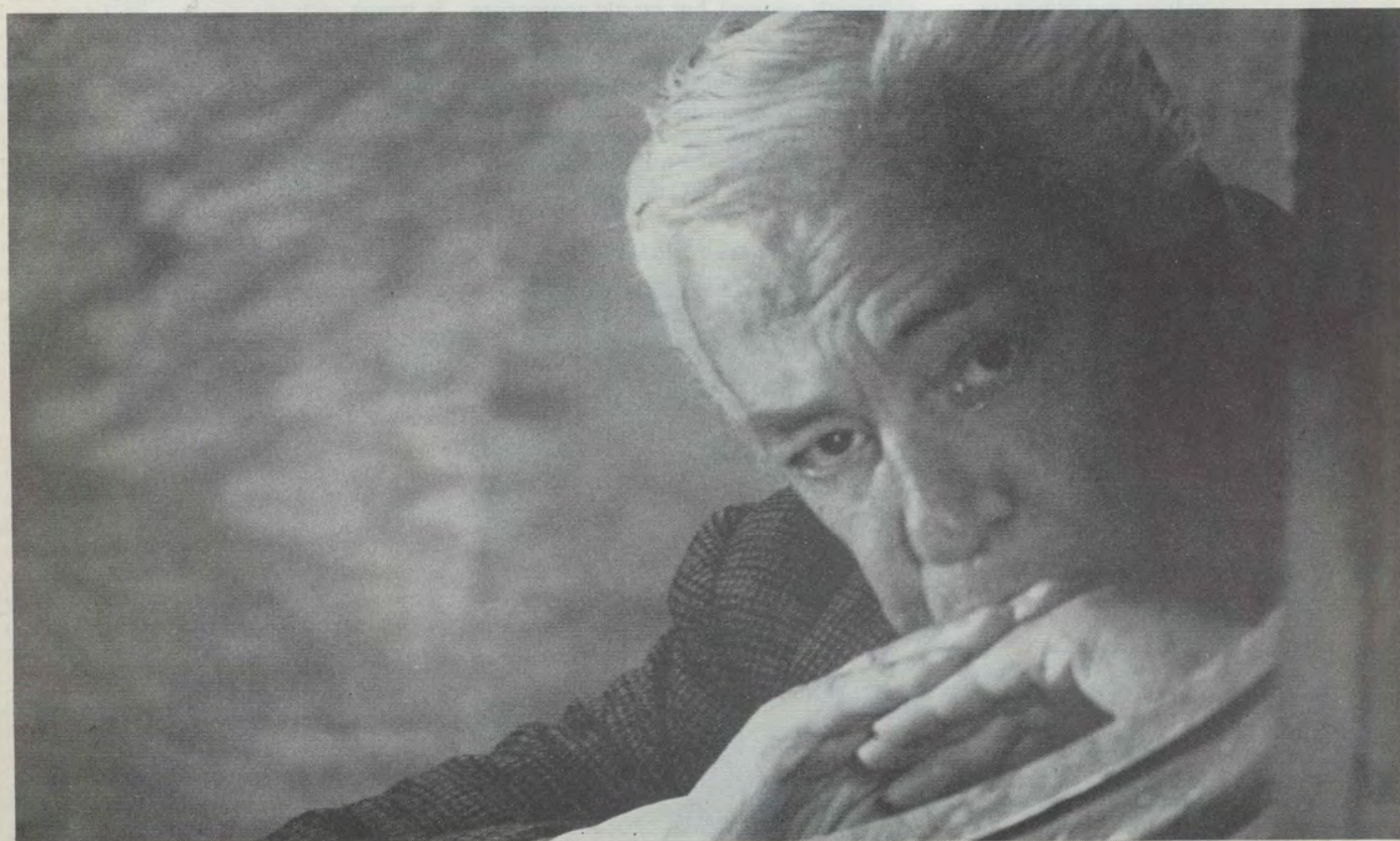
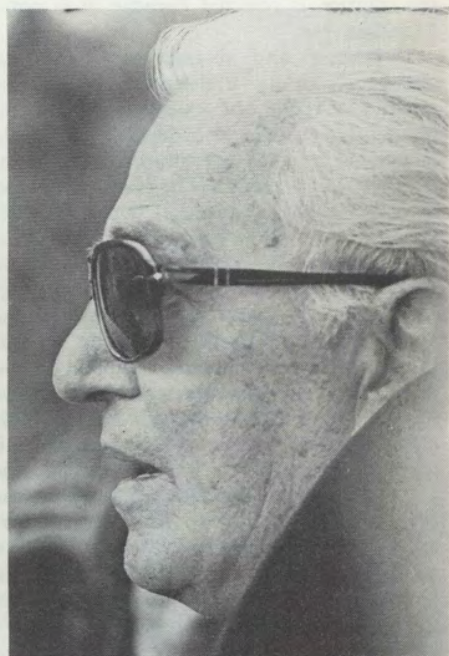




VITTORIO

**Always a
true
window**

Gideon Bachmann



DE SICA

Perhaps nobody has understood the foibles of his fellow beings as well, and ended up loving them as much nevertheless, as Vittorio De Sica, who died on November 13th, 1974. The last shooting day on his last film was January 8th, 1974. The film was *Il Viaggio*, with Sophia Loren and Richard Burton. The shooting took place in a second-floor room of the Hotel Milan, in Via Manzoni, Milan, a room in which nothing had been moved for almost eighty years. It is the room in which Giuseppe Verdi died.

I hadn't seen De Sica for a few years. He had had an operation, and before that he had had trouble with his eyes. Once I had invited him to the tower—an old medieval one in the centre of the Forum, where I lived for five years—to shoot, on the rooftop terrace, one of those interviews one expects to see from Rome: the famous man, smiling suavely, leaning against the geraniums. I had invited him with some trepidation, because of his sight problem. But he had come, all white in a suit that seemed recut from the wardrobe supplies of one of his hundred films of the 1930s, resplendent in joviality and warmth. I never knew, that sunny afternoon, whether he actually saw the camera. His smile had never sunk back into the wrinkles.

This time, too, I expected to see him affected by his recent operation, but found him alive with the sparkle of work. There he was, as we came in, explaining to Richard Burton how to look out of a window. Burton, on a trip with a woman he is not married to, and this in the Italy of almost a century ago, is there at the window in his silk morning robe; he is to turn back to the woman, still in bed, and then receive, from the waiter who has rolled in the breakfast on its silver tray, the news of the Sicilian earthquake. The room has been lit for 3200 degrees Kelvin, indoor lighting, and the window is thus closed, covered with orange gelatine sheets; the out-of-doors is only a remote presence. And yet Burton is to play to it; after all, they came all the way to Milan for this window, for this view of a grey, foggy, drizzly turn of the century architectural monstrosity.

It is a scene of no importance, something any director could have wrapped up in a few early morning takes. Sophia Loren isn't even there, in the bed. Her place is taken by Annabella Incontrera, not a stand-in but playing one. But De Sica wants it, like everything he does, just right. We shoot, and shoot again, with our silent TV cameras, the face of De Sica as he watches Burton at the window, the eyes squinting, the lips slightly pursed, the head leaning back: he is trying to see the shot as it will appear later, screened. He is trying to translate what he is in the process of creating into something he has already created. Trying to turn an act into a creature. Everything shows on that transparent face. I can tell, between our own shots, whether he is happy with the take, and know, early enough to be ready for

another shot, that he will try it one more time. Counting acting as well as directing, he has made, they say, almost two hundred films. And he's still a perfectionist, still a beginner.

The next one is better. Burton is to lean over Annabella, who's on the floor, impersonating a dying Sophia. He's supposed to cry and all, emote as they say in Hollywood. But his eyes twinkle; he nuzzles Annabella. They have to paint glycerine tears on him. I am struck by the unreality of it all, adult people creeping around on the floor, faking despair under a thousand watt-candle's and the dead Verdi's incredulous gaze.

But for De Sica, quite obviously, this is reality. He laughs with them, then gets them all back to the shot, to the mood, to work. Patiently he explains things in his floppy English, its edges rounded by the Italian's inability to stop a word before the next word begins. Neil Robinson, his friend and assistant, British, correct and compassionate, translates when the lines sag. Finally De Sica gets down on the floor, leans over the prostrate Annabella. His face changes, he has made the step from the observation post into the forest. And miraculously the whole thing falls into shape. What the virile leading man's image hadn't been able to convey, this old man in the short-sleeved sweater and with the face blotched by liver spots almost automatically exudes: the sorrow and anguish of that moment in the film for a brief instant invades the room. Awed, and without knowing it, Annabella looks at the face three inches above her, as if she were watching her own death. As De Sica has stepped into character, everyone else has become audience. It is the master casting his spell.

Later, Barry Norman interviews him for the BBC programme we're working on. Listening to that old tape now, a year later, I suddenly realise what the man has been saying. 'I choose this Pirandello, very exceptional Pirandello, not philosophical but romantic, because is very tragic work, is very tragic journey toward death. Is no social message, is *ambience*, is *ambience* of nineteenth century, is my period, a dream, a record, a remember of mine. I need to propose these old story. I was born in 1901...' They talk of neo-realism, of course, and he patiently goes over *Umberto D* and *Bicycle Thieves*, plays the De Sica part and talks of non-professional actors. The inevitable happens: Barry gets to the 'your next film, Mr. Director' part of the show. Barry doesn't skirt rapids, he shoots them.

De Sica, with rapids, is more experienced. All his life, he has told stories. He answers with one from his youth, when like every other self-respecting aspirant to movie-making he went to Hollywood as a reporter. After meeting 'the great master' ('I mean Charlie Chaplin,' he adds, in case Barry has other idols), he wrote something, in Italian, about Chaplin's latest film. When the word 'latest' was translated back to Chaplin as 'last', De Sica was summoned. Chaplin seems to have been furious. 'I shall never make a last film,' he seems to have said. '“I shall always continue,” he said me,' De Sica says. 'And for me is the same; for me work also is life.' He realises that things have changed around him, and knows he

can't stop them. But his passions have remained the same.

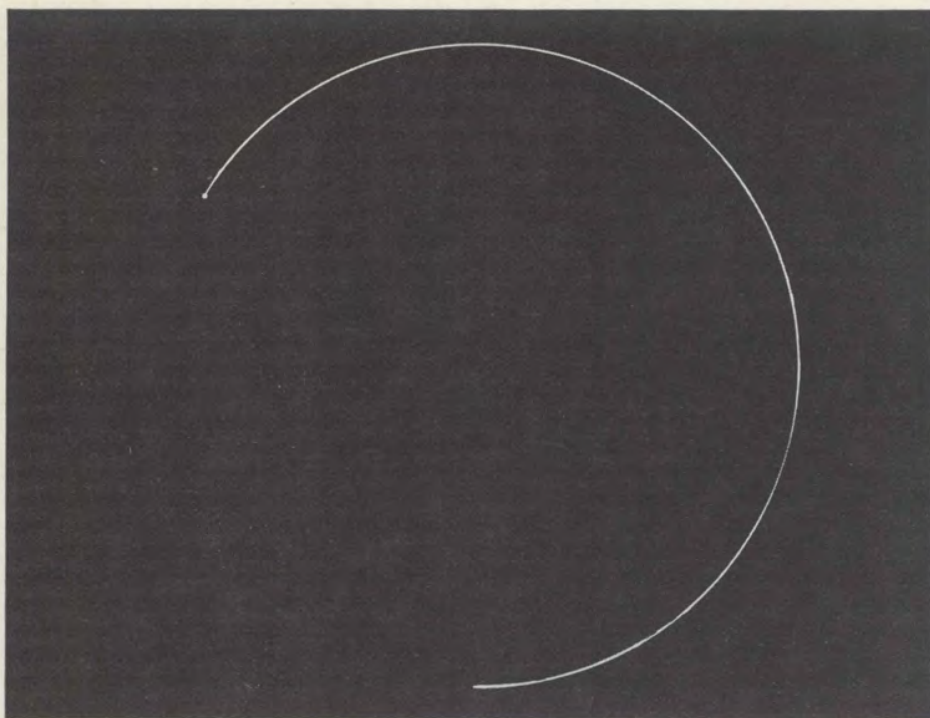
'After the terrible war, myself and my colleagues try to change a little this horrible distance between human-human being, the pictures hope communicate solidarity, unite these lonely being... now solidarity is more remote, distance far more great, there is violence, cruelty. I hate this period, I don't understand this period. Criminality is too much for my soul, I cannot describe the violence like Kubrick. Kubrick is very clever, I admire him, but my artistic possibility, for this horrible life, this horrible relationship between human being, I can't... I like poetry, I like women, I am not moralist, but I don't like to see women in pornographic picture, like animals... my goal in pictures is poetry and humanity, humanity and poetry.'

His eyes continue smiling into our camera as he says this, but you feel he is not just talking into a camera. As I look at him while silence descends and we keep the tape going, voyeurs by profession, I recognise his sadness at being misunderstood, at being criticised for having given up realism, at the young critics, and those who think that's what they are, of the left, who no longer attribute to him a central position in Italian cinema. We are still in Verdi's room, the window has been cleared of the production debris, and he is looking at it, as if at another era. Why did he travel all the way to Milan for this window?

'I like very much the past. But is not real! So I want to make this picture in real past... I make it all in real *ambience*, real sets. In Palermo, in Sicily, in Naples, in Venice. Everywhere I need a real window. A view over town. I need absolute a window, always a true window. In Palermo I saw the cathedral over Palermo, in Naples another monument of Naples. In Venice the little isle of San Giorgio through a window. Now a very simple street of Milan, they have no monuments. So I put flowers in the window. Is monument to what is inside.'

Film 74 is a popular programme; we are not there to be nostalgic. The De Sica interview is only part of a show that is being done about Richard Burton. But we have a chance to stay around for the rest of the day, the last shooting day of the film. De Sica has one more scene to tie up, a link shot as a telegram is brought through the hotel lobby. As we can't resist doing a bit of filming, he plays for us. He knows that we can't use anything in Italian, so he gives camera instructions in English; but all he can remember is 'clean the gate'.

As the afternoon outside progresses into another Milanese night smog with its streetcar screeches, the century-old hotel lobby, its frayed tapestries pretending a brief renaissance under the film's lights, floats forth into time like a spaceship, all pomp and *fin de siècle* circumstance. Its incredible helmsman winks over at us, shouting again and again, with disdain for the camera operator's exasperation, 'Clean the gate! Clean the gate!' In a way, I feel, it is all part of his 'hope communicate solidarity'. With a fierce expression, he plays the Hollywood director. Then he looks over, smiling broadly. We return the smile, applauding. It is his last public performance.



'Line describing a Cone'

EXPRMNTL 5

LINES DESCRIBING AN IMPASSE

Tony Rayns

Festivals are even more important to the avant-garde than they are to the commercial industry. There are many factors that conspire to deter or prevent independent film-makers from distributing work outside their own country: the onus is on festivals to do for the avant-garde what an entire system (commercial exhibition; the critical establishment; film society and television screenings) does for mainstream cinema. The best festivals of the avant-garde are also the most sheerly functional: they provide a sympathetic—which is not to say uncritical—ambience for film-makers to screen and discuss their work, and establish the network of 'grapevine' contacts that makes follow-up screenings possible. The NFT festival in September 1973 did substantially that,

and revealed some remarkable film-making while it was about it. But EXPRMNTL 5, the Fifth International Experimental Film Competition at Knokke-Heist, served neither film-makers nor audiences.

Earlier Knokke festivals (the last was EXPRMNTL 4 in 1967) were instrumental in bringing avant-garde film to its present strength; the valiant Jacques Ledoux, who has now organised three of them, has probably done more for the cause than any other man in Europe. The child, however, has inexorably outgrown its cradle. Knokke remains a competitive event (with eight cash prizes and a handful of other awards), while many film-makers have come to reject the very notion of being in competition with each other. It provides excellent facilities for visiting journalists, whatever their orientation, but none for film-makers themselves. It screens each competing film twice, while its daily forum on the films clashes with a once-only screening of non-competing movies. And the calibre of the entire event rests squarely upon the act of selection, here as before in the hands of a Belgian committee; EXPRMNTL 5 attracted 409 entries, and the Committee chose 74 of them to compete and a further 69 for supplementary shows. There was no way of telling whether any masterpieces got lost amongst the 266 films submitted but never screened at all, but as the week-long festival proceeded there were more and more reasons for questioning the Committee's strategies and criteria.



Werner Nekes in Dore O's 'Kaskara'

From the first day there were rumours of ideological splits within the Committee—of one member resigning in protest and boycotting the festival. Certainly, Erik De Kuyper never showed up. No one was exactly reassured by the Committee's habit of 'nudging' the Jury by selecting several movies from one film-maker for the competition while eliminating others' work *in toto*. (For many viewers, this strategy reached its nadir with the inclusion of three virtually identical movies by James Herbert (USA), each more like Harrison Marks than the last; the Committee justified its choice simply by saying that it liked them.) Doubts finally petrified into overt hostility when the Committee awarded its own (non-cash) prize to Claudine Eizykman's *Vitesses-Women* (France), a movie that consists of nothing but an alternating current between twin strains of *Vogue* and *Playgirl* imagery. The issue was not at all one of taste, but rather one of basic competence: was this committee sufficiently engaged with (or even aware of) the nature of experiment in contemporary film to perform its task adequately?

However large the question loomed as one sat through session after session of dull, formulary and sometimes outright reactionary movies, it is of no more than academic importance in the context of a festival whose entire structure belongs to the past. Now that avant-garde film no longer needs to fight to draw attention to its very existence, the EXPRMNTL competition has become an anachronism. Unless there are quite radical changes to its principles, it seems unlikely that there can ever be an EXPRMNTL 6.

By no means all the movies screened were worthless or regressive, as the following notes should demonstrate, but it's undeniable that the vast majority stayed safely within aesthetic parameters that have been defined for some considerable time. Many of the best films at Knokke would look timid alongside recent work by several major film-makers (Malcolm LeGrice, Klaus Wyborny and Mike Snow spring to mind) who were not, for whatever reason, represented. Knokke's diminished perspective makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the movies in or out of competition. But this legitimate hesitation should be distinguished from two other issues that often obstruct discussion of avant-garde cinema. First, the overall low standard was both inevitable and necessary, as it is at film festivals of all kinds the world over. Second, 'radical' art by its nature takes longer to sink in than 'conservative' art, and it may well be that some of this year's films will reveal their qualities in retrospect; it's salutary to remember that the main prizewinner of 1967, Mike Snow's *Wavelength*, was ridiculed by many (including SIGHT AND SOUND) at the time, but has since been widely celebrated as the cornerstone for a new film aesthetic.

Ex--mental péri

The inevitable political broadsheet that appeared anonymously to attack the festival (under the heading 'Ex--mental péri') was curiously off-target in accusing the Selection Committee of suppressing researches into film language and favouring visual frivolities at the expense of depth psycho-

logy (!) and popular culture. In fact, the selection looked desperately eclectic, as if anything even marginally different from its neighbours had found an easy path into the competition. As a result, Knokke periodically had the air of elimination heats in a contest to define 'experiment', with the winners emerging principally by default.

Experiment by any definition was surely dead in the clutch of movies that applied Hollywood-style special effects to variously pretentious odysseys through life and its vagaries. Least offensive of these (insofar as it remains conscious of its own absurdity) was FuDing Cheng's *White in Bad Light* (USA), a psychedelic rampage through the astral plane of *Captain Marvel*, the Firesign Theatre and *Doctor Strange* with a lot of hokey visual trickery engineered by Pat O'Neill. Moribund too were the variations on straight narrative form, which usually sought to invest existing 'texts' with a Straub-like materiality: Louis Skorecki's *Eugenie de Franval* (France), for instance, gabbles the entirety of de Sade's novella on its soundtrack while an understandably despondent cast plot through its motions in a bare room. The approach is infinitely repeatable, and susceptible to infinite coarsening: Walter Bockmayer's *La Traviata* (W. Germany) offers a parade of seemingly drunken transvestites miming to the opera.

Surrealist provocations were an equally poor bet, at least as practised by a Belgian contingent believing that there are still visual/thematic taboos to be broken. Prize exhibit in this category was Thierry Zeno's *Vase de nocces* (*Mud Wedding?*), which spends around 80 minutes on a three-line anecdote about a latter-day hermit's sexual love for a sow. They mate; she litters; piglets and mother die; he's miserable; starts eating his own faeces; hangs himself. Filmed in a staid narrative style (doubtless part of the joke) and accompanied by 'religious' music and chorales, it will presumably outrage practising Catholics. Roland Lethem's *La Tête d'un frère* is more vehement (if seriously questionable) in its lingering depiction of a goose's death-throes as a metaphor for the torture of the

late anarchist Holger Meins in a German jail. As such movies strain to exceed the licence that the commercial cinema increasingly enjoys, they both alienate themselves from their roots in surrealism's 'permanent revelation' and hit the law of diminishing returns. Discussion of *Vase de nocces* centred on the fact that its acts of bestiality were obviously faked.

Interestingly, Otto Mühl, the grand old man of sex'n violence material-actions, turned up in a late night festival 'extra' that showed him to be a reformed character. While a hardy few watched Clive Myer's *264 Sections of Latitude and Longitude* (GB) (a dogged traversal of the *Daily Telegraph* world map, square by square) in the cinema, a crowd in the foyer witnessed *The Cherries in Daddy's Garden*, a jovial propaganda documentary on Mühl's 'action-analysis' therapy methods as evolved in a bizarre commune outside Vienna. The commune members, in unisex crewcuts, noisily exorcise their repressions while the founder himself reveals a hitherto unsuspected talent for bar-room piano.

A Structure is a Structure

Most of the genuinely avant-garde work was, not surprisingly, being done in the area of so-called 'structural' film, and had no recourse to drama, fiction or indeed representation of any semantic kind. Since *Wavelength* pointed the way, many film-makers have effectively confined their work to investigations of film's material properties; the range of activity is vast, but there is basic common ground in the determination to draw 'meaning' from nothing but the formal filmic construction and the perceptual processes of the eye and mind in dealing with it. In this broad sense, structural film occupies a kind of mid-point between 'process' art (of the kind that has dominated new painting and music for many years) and the insights of semiology (which deny the artist most of his supposed status as a creator, and see him rather as an individual who deploys various pre-existing codes in more or less rich patterns). The viewer's resolution of such stimuli into a

Martha Haslanger's 'Syntax'



sensory and intellectual experience is, of course, a process very different from the deciphering and interpreting of a narrative movie, although both processes are governed by the clarity and density of the 'information' that the film-maker provides.

There were fewer structural films at Knokke than might have been expected (no doubt thanks to the selectors' eclecticism), and those on show offered mixed indications of the form's future. Several respected veterans of the aesthetic came up with movies that did little but mark time by their own rigorous standards: Wilhelm and Birgit Hein's *Strukturelle Studien* (W. Germany) is simply a 'greatest hits'-style compilation of excerpts from their earlier work, looking as no-nonsense as ever but hardly still innovative; Werner Nekes' *Makimono* (also W. Germany; Nekes was the founder of the Hamburg Film Co-op) is yet another landscape movie that puts a limited repertoire of shots (static views, pans at various speeds) through the standard permutations (superimpositions, juxtapositions of place and time) and ends up with a dead ringer for several earlier movies, albeit distinguished by Anthony Moore's powerful electronic score.

Relative newcomers to the field were more inventive, and wittier. Anna Ambrose's prizewinning *Noodle Spinner* (GB) takes simple basic footage of a Chinese chef spinning noodles, and then splits, loops, reduces and/or staggers it to build a series of multiple-image collages in motion. The (astonishing) art of noodle spinning remains as mysterious as the protagonist's account of his life in Cantonese on the soundtrack; Ms. Ambrose clearly admires it for its rhythm and expertise, and has straightforwardly devised a film-form that displays both to fine advantage. Mike Henley strikes a comparable balance between beautiful content and formal integrity/autonomy in *Sunlight* (GB): a fleeting, pellucid image of the sun rising over a townscape is enjoyed for itself, while the fact of showing it in negative keeps in the forefront the aesthetic decisions that got it on the screen. Neither film could be simpler, and both are very modest; and yet each is really refreshing in its poetic grasp of its medium as a means of perceiving a visual phenomenon.

There are, of course, many ways of complicating such strategies without sacrificing their clarity. One is to introduce random factors into the shooting: Mike Dunford's *Still Life With Pear* (GB; another prizewinner) begins with its camera moving round a room, following the instructions on a pre-recorded tape, and then has it attempt to repeat the process while negotiating visible obstacles that have been introduced into its path; working exclusively in terms of the shooting process, it generates an oddly humorous drama from the tension between a specified plan and necessary departures from it. Another way is to play on the viewer's difficulty in reconciling certain kinds of signal with what he knows to be on the screen: Tsuneo Nakai's *Azoth* (Japan) shows a fixed-view colour landscape—possibly even a still—and overlays it with increasingly complex strobe effects; during the sensory bombardment, one's perception of the image's scale, depth and colour goes through drastic, extraordinary alterations. Nakai won a prize for

a bolder, less subtle film, *Alchemy*, a slow zoom towards a fluctuating light source that makes apparent his conceptual debts to Snow and Tony Conrad; the two movies together constituted the strongest (and most enervating) visual experience to be had at Knokke, a purely sensory equivalent of high-powered melodrama.

Yet another way is to exploit the variables in film processing. J. J. Murphy's prize-winner *Print Generation* (USA) starts as an abstract pulse of coloured light, then recedes through 25 generations of optical dupe to reveal that it comprises a loop of banal, everyday images, and then returns, generation by generation, to its abstract state. It works initially as a guessing game (inviting the audience to guess the 'real' images), and then turns into a celebration of the unlimited, unpredictable visual variety that the technical process can yield.

A few movies set out to establish and exhaustively analyse genuinely minimal structure-systems. Bill Brand's *Demolition of a Wall* (USA) takes six frames from the Lumière sequence of that name, correlates each with a pitch on a musical scale, and then permutes each frame/note in every possible order. The musical rhythm once or twice diverges from the visual one, challenging the hypnotic, obsessive pattern, but the structure is finally more limiting than liberating. (Brand's recent work on pure colour, eliminated from the festival but shown subsequently in London, is much richer.) Anthony McCall, who is English but currently works in New York, dispenses with image altogether, and directs the viewer's attention to the beam from the projector as it travels through space. His prizewinning *Line Describing a Cone* does just that, as a thin white line slowly describes a ring on the black film-frame, and the projector beam translates the signal into a hollow cone of light. As much kinetic sculpture as film, the piece is better shown in a gallery than a conventional cinema, especially since it's more satisfying to view it from varying positions. All that's needed to enjoy it is a liking for light and precise form.

History, Memory and Dream

Three distinctive movies recognised no movement but their own, and resisted classification. Michio Okabe's *Shonen-shiko* (Japan; a prizewinner) is an historical account of pederasty in a Buddhist temple school, reminiscent of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* in its free admixture of live action, hand-tinting, animation and stills, original and 'borrowed' images, the literal and the figurative. It progresses rhetorically through a series of inter-related motifs—martial, sexual, social, religious—drawing them into a web of adolescent sexuality, Japanese militarism (shades of Mishima) and the enormous weight of an inherited culture. It contrives to be mildly indecent, hilariously funny and nostalgic-tragic in rapid succession. Its icons doubtless conjure specific associations for a Japanese audience; anyone else will find enough to respect in its brilliantly judged form.

Martha Haslanger's *Syntax* (USA) makes the witty proposal that film perception might approximate to the patterns of mental recollection. She begins with shots of a

middle-class living room and superimposes titles that catalogue the things we can (or sometimes cannot) see; she then cuts to shots of a pensive man on a balcony and uses the titles to replicate snatches of conversation we catch from somewhere off-screen. To quote the film itself, what goes on is 'more to do with writing than what's written'; as random details accumulate, the film resolves itself into a schema of 'repetition, preservation, re-enactment, recitation,' the syntax of memory.

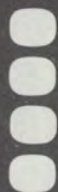
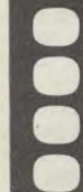
Dore O's *Kaskara* (W. Germany) was the most idiosyncratic film at Knokke, and won the top prize. It's a reverie that engages more immediately through its mood than through its elusive form. Most of the time it shows the film-maker's husband Werner Nekes in and around a country cottage, often in double or treble superimposition; first windows, then doors define frames within the frame. There is a sense of being poised between motion and stasis, underlined by the spasmodic irruptions of grainy black-and-white imagery, which works as a bleak antithesis to the main footage. Another of Anthony Moore's remarkable scores (a wordless choral fragment, repeated several times) textures the images even more densely and tends to impose a rhythm on them . . . until it breaks off and leaves them in tremulous suspension, like moments of 'frozen' time.

Solaria Magellani

Despite the plenitude of non-filmic sights and diversions (including programmes of video, theatre and political music), the rest of the festival was a dozy, low-key affair, characterised by frequent walk-outs from the cinema (disappointment motivating more of them than anger) and occasional explosions of extra-curricular energy (most of them centring on Pierre Clémenti's saxophone). There was one nostalgic nude happening, which attracted the attention of no one but, incredibly, the police, who promptly arrested those participants who didn't happen to be Belgian and jailed them for two days. It was all too symptomatic of the general *malaise* that Knokke's one incontrovertible success was its retrospective: four sessions devoted to the complete work of Hollis Frampton.

Ledoux sees Frampton as the most important American film-maker of the moment, and it's hard to disagree with him; each of the movies in what is now a large body of work is both a major independent statement and a stage in the film-maker's on-going research into his medium's potential and limitations. Knokke premiered Frampton's latest film, the four-part *Solaria Magellani*, which he described as 'a fully rigorous, but non-linear and non-narrative method for the montage of film images in a temporal sequence.' On first viewing, it looks as if he proposes three distinct but associated methods: a highly formal structure perhaps akin to metric verse; a system based on a kind of 'assonance' of visual motions and rhythms; and the structure of a lexicon. The four sections, named after the seasons, each exemplify one or other of the methods, but they are also riddled with other kinds of cross-reference and internal symmetry; they collide and mesh in the mind, and one look isn't enough to sort them out, let alone draw conclusions. ■

IN THE PICTURE



Censorship

On 28 January 1975 the Greater London Council, to the great glee of the Festival of Light, rejected by 50 votes to 44 a proposal to abolish film censorship for adults in the Greater London area. This was the culmination not only of 18 months as chairman of the GLC's film viewing board by Mrs. Enid Wistrich, but also of a remarkable series of related events which suggest that the system of controlling the content of films shown in Britain—not significantly changed for the past fifty years—is likely soon to be radically altered.

If that is so it will be due particularly to the efforts of Mrs. Wistrich. For, continuing the approach of her predecessor, Alec Grant, who introduced in 1965 the rule that the GLC would only censor films on grounds that they were violating the law, she finally concluded, in a twin report on the 'Exercise of the Council's Powers of Film Censorship for Adults' and 'The Future of Film Censorship for Adults' which together form easily the best official report in Britain on film censorship since the thirties, that there was no longer any justification for censoring films for adult audiences at all.

As the GLC was under no legal obligation to control film content for adults (only for child audiences), and since there was no overwhelming case for keeping it—either in public attitudes or in evidence of harmful effects—it should therefore be discontinued. The Council should maintain, however, the recent stringent control over front of house publicity and foyer information about film content. Her proposal was defeated by a narrow margin, which would have been even smaller if the chairman, vice-chairman and deputy chairman of the GLC had not all broken precedent and voted in the division—against abolition. There is also evidence of some

government pressure to obtain the negative vote.

The Government certainly feared that the floodgates could be opened, for the obscenity legislation does not touch films which are subject to local authority licensing. Mrs. Wistrich had, in fact, tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Government to study the possible reform of the film censorship laws; and it would seem that the close vote in the GLC has at last prodded the Home Office to respond rather more positively. It is very probable that if the previous Government's Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill (which has by no means been altogether

dropped by the Home Office) had been enacted the vote could have gone the other way. For the key to the situation is the need to bring films under the same legal regime as plays.

This is emphasised by the ruling of Mr. Justice Kenneth Jones in the Old Bailey in November 1974, in a private prosecution for obscenity of the distributors of *Last Tango in Paris*, that the Obscene Publications Act specifically excludes licensed cinema audiences from consideration, that the only person to whom the distributors could therefore 'publish' their film was the exhibitor, and that he was not corrupted (there was no evidence that he had even seen the film). The jury was therefore directed to return a verdict of not guilty. *Last Tango in Paris* had been passed by the BBFC, and so would still not be caught if effect were given to the Law Commission's suggestion, in its recent working paper on 'Conspiracies relating to Morals and Decency', to bring all exhibitions of films upon *unlicensed* premises within the operation of the Obscene Publications Act.

The Home Office, in its working paper on 'Vagrancy and Street Offences', also published about the turn of the year, referred to the modern development of 'the installation of "peepshow" machines in amusement arcades and elsewhere showing scenes of actual or simulated intercourse,' and recommended the creation of a new offence to prevent peepshow machines being used in public places to show indecent material. Otherwise, it thought, exhibitions such as film shows to which the public gained admission by an act of will should be excluded from

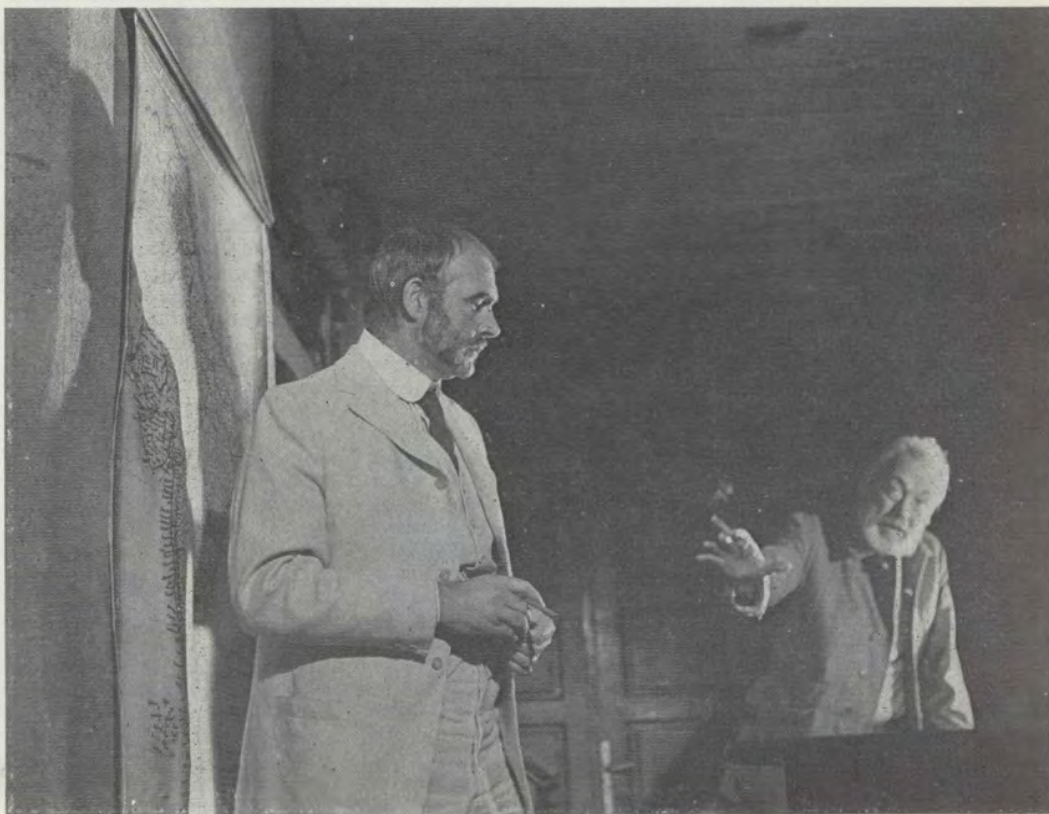
the law on indecent display and governed solely by the law on obscenity.

We find, therefore, developments in the law of indecency which would control film content solely by the obscenity laws on unlicensed premises and by local authority censorship on licensed premises. To remove the censorship it will be necessary to run the two categories together and bring them both under the obscenity law, a proposal urged by Mrs. Wistrich in her report and the subject of a motion set down in the House of Commons by a group of Labour MPs at the end of January, after the GLC vote.

When that step has been taken, the way will be open for the British Board of Film Censors to change into a classifying agency for films shown to children, as proposed by Mrs. Wistrich. The Board is, in any case, in a state of uncertainty following the New Year resignation of its Secretary, Stephen Murphy, who took over from John Trevelyan in 1971 and who will leave this summer to enable 'somebody new to come and put a fresh mind to it.' No successor has yet been appointed; whoever is chosen will need to have a good head for politics, for the future of the Board will be increasingly put in question in the coming years.

Indeed, this appears to be but one more strand in a pattern which could lead to very fundamental decisions being taken on all forms of expression well before the end of the decade. We have recently had reports on privacy (Younger report), secrecy (Franks report) and contempt of court (Phillimore report); and at various points in the pipeline are the Faulks Committee on defamation, Whitford

John Huston directs Sean Connery in his film of Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King'



Committee on copyright, Annan Committee on broadcasting and the Royal Commission on the Press. If to those are added the Wistrich report on film censorship, perhaps supplemented by a further departmental committee, and the working papers of the Home Office working party and the Law Commission, the result will, over a period of some five years, be a collection of interrelated and exhaustive surveys of aspects of freedom of expression in all media.

The development of both cable and cassette TV over that time is bound to reduce the special situation of the cinema and bring it much closer to that of the theatre, books and records. It will consequently be increasingly difficult to maintain over it alone a censorship control which is not now applied to any of these forms of expression.

NEVILLE HUNNINGS

Malick on Badlands

Interviewing Terry Malick, producer-writer-director of *Badlands*, turned out, like his film, to be full of idiosyncratic surprises. My prepared list of questions went by the wayside as Malick talked with passion, conviction and sometimes anger about his film. Acknowledging that he 'couldn't have asked for more' in terms of critical acceptance, he also indicated that the actual filming was painful. Working in the dead heat of the 1972 summer, with a non-union crew and little money (\$300,000, excluding some deferments to labs and actors), Malick encountered all sorts of problems, from difficulties over finance to the destruction of all the cameras during a fire sequence. Eventually, upon completion, Warners bought *Badlands* for just under a million dollars. It might turn in a decent profit for them.

The son of an oil company executive, Malick grew up in Texas and Oklahoma. He went to Harvard and later to Magdalen College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. Philosophy was his course of study, but he never completed his thesis—in fact, his topic wasn't even acceptable to his Senior Tutor, Gilbert Ryle. Summer jobs took him from the wheat harvests in America and Canada, to work in oilfields and driving a cement mixer in a railyard, to journalistic endeavours for *Life*, *Newsweek* and the *New Yorker*. He was sent to Bolivia to observe the trial of Régis Debray; Che Guevara was killed the day after his arrival. In 1968, he was appointed a lecturer in philosophy for one year at M.I.T.

'I was not a good teacher; I didn't have the sort of edge one should have on the students, so I decided to do something else. I'd always liked movies in a kind of naïve way. They seemed no less improbable a career than anything else. I came to Los Angeles in the fall of 1969 to study at the A.F.I.; I made a short called *Lanton Mills*. I found the A.F.I. very



'*Badlands*': Terry Malick himself plays the inopportune caller at the rich man's house

helpful; it's a marvellous place. My wife was going to law school and I was working for a time as a rewrite man—two days on *Drive, He Said*, five weeks on the predecessor to *Dirty Harry* at a time when Brando was going to do it with Irving Kershner directing. Then we all got fired by Warners; the project went to Clint Eastwood. I rewrote *Pocket Money* and *Deadhead Miles*. I got this work because of a phenomenal agent, Mike Medavoy.

'At the end of my second year here, I began work on *Badlands*. I wrote and, at the same time, developed a kind of sales kit with slides and video tape of actors, all with a view to presenting investors with something that would look ready to shoot. To my surprise, they didn't pay too much attention to it; they invested on faith. I raised about half the money and Edward Pressman (the executive producer) the other half. We started in July of 1972.

'The critics talked about influences on the picture and in most cases referred to films I had never seen. My influences were books like *The Hardy Boys*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huck Finn*—all involving an innocent in a drama over his or her head. I didn't actually think about those books before I did the script, but it's obvious to me now. Nancy Drew, the children's story child detective—I did think about her.

'There is some humour in the picture, I believe. Not jokes. It lies in Holly's mis-estimation of her audience, of what they will be

interested in or ready to believe. (She seems at times to think of her narration as like what you get in audio-visual courses in high school.) When they're crossing the badlands, instead of telling us what's going on between Kit and herself, or anything of what we'd like and have to know, she describes what they ate and what it tasted like, as though we might be planning a similar trip and appreciate her experience, *this way*.

'She's a typical Southern girl in her desire to help, to give hard fact; not to dwell upon herself, which to her would be unseemly, but always to keep in mind the needs of others. She wants to come off in the best possible light, but she's scrupulous enough to take responsibility where in any way she might have contributed.'

I suggest to Malick that the film has been criticised for patronising Holly and her milieu. 'That's foolishness. I grew up around people like Kit and Holly. I see no gulf between them and myself. One of the things the actors and I used to talk about was never stepping outside the characters and winking at the audience, never getting off the hook. If you keep your hands off the characters, you open yourself to charges like that; at least you have no *defence* against them. What I find patronising is people not leaving the characters alone, stacking the deck for them, not respecting their integrity, their difference.

'Holly's Southernness is essential to taking her right. She isn't indifferent about her father's death.

She might have cried buckets of tears, but she wouldn't think of telling *you* about it. It would not be proper. You should always feel there are large parts of her experience she's not including because she has a strong, if misplaced, sense of propriety. You might well wonder how anyone going through what she does could be at all concerned about proprieties. But she is. And her kind of cliché didn't begin with pulp magazines, as some critics have suggested. It exists in Nancy Drew and Tom Sawyer. It's not the mark of a diminished, pulp-fed mind, I'm trying to say, but of the 'innocent abroad'. When people express what is most important to them, it often comes out in clichés. That doesn't make them laughable; it's something tender about them. As though in struggling to reach what's most personal about them they could only come up with what's most public.

'Holly is in a way the more important character; at least you get a glimpse of what she's like. And I like women characters better than men; they're more open to things around them, more demonstrative. Kit, on the other hand, is a closed book, not a rare trait in people who have tasted more than their share of bitterness in life. The movies have kept up a myth that suffering makes you deep. It inclines you to say deep things. It builds character and is generally healthful. It teaches you lessons you never forget. People who've suffered go around in movies with long, thoughtful faces, as though everything had caved in just yesterday. It's not that way in real life, though, not always. Suffering can make you shallow and just the opposite of vulnerable, dense. It's had this kind of effect on Kit.

'Kit doesn't see himself as anything sad or pitiable, but as a subject of incredible interest, to himself and to future generations. Like Holly, like a child, he can only really believe in what's going on inside him. Death, other people's feelings, the consequences of his actions—they're all sort of abstract for him. He thinks of himself as a successor to James Dean—a Rebel without a Cause—when in reality he's more like an Eisenhower conservative. "Consider the minority opinion," he says into the rich man's tape recorder, "but try to get along with the majority opinion once it's accepted." He doesn't really believe any of this, but he envies the people who do, who *can*. He wants to be like them, like the rich man he locks in the closet, the only man he doesn't kill, the only man he *sympathises* with, and the one least in need of sympathy. It's not infrequently the people at the bottom who most vigorously defend the very rules that put and keep them there.

'And there's something about growing up in the Midwest. There's no check on you. People imagine it's the kind of place where your behaviour is under constant observation, where you

really have to toe the line. They got that idea from Sinclair Lewis. But people can really get ignored there and fall into bad soil. Kit did, and he grew up like a big poisonous weed.

"I don't think he's a character peculiar to his time. I tried to keep the 1950s to a bare minimum. Nostalgia is a powerful feeling; it can drown out anything. I wanted the picture to set up like a fairy tale, outside time, like *Treasure Island*. I hoped this would, among other things, take a little of the sharpness out of the violence but still keep its dreamy quality. Children's books are full of violence. Long John Silver slits the throats of the faithful crew. Kit and Holly even think of themselves as living in a fairy tale. Holly says, 'Sometimes I wished I could fall asleep and be taken off to some magical land, but this never happened.' But she enough believes there is such a place that she must confess to you she never got there."

BEVERLY WALKER

Grooming the Godfather

When *The Godfather* was shown on NBC last November, what an alert viewer did not notice distinguished it from the usual television prints of theatrical films. Although the broadcast version differed from the original in its treatment of violence, profanity and sex, it would have taken a shot by shot comparison with a complete print to detect specific deletions. If the film kept its original impact, it was because this new version had been edited with unusual care by the man most familiar with the original, the film's director Francis Ford Coppola.

Until recently, responsibility for cutting has been exclusively in the hands of the networks' Departments of Broadcast Standards, inevitably more concerned with removing questionable material than with maintaining story continuity and structure. Such insensitive treatment of films has produced strong reaction from film-makers, notably Peter Hall, who felt that his *Three Into Two Won't Go* was so severely altered that he had his name removed from the credits of the TV print. Still, the situation may not be as dismal as some film-makers think. Coppola believes that 'any director who has his film sold to television, if he cares at all about it, could at any time notify the network that he'd like to help, and I'm sure they would be happy to let him. Many directors complain about things that are within their power to change.'

Coppola's opinion is supported by Herminio Traviesas, Vice-President of NBC's Department of Broadcast Standards. 'I don't think we would ever have refused a reasonable request, although I still think we would have had the last right of approval. When Richard Brooks called me on \$, I don't

think it was a contractual arrangement. He just said, 'I'd like to help you with it,' and we said, 'Fine.'" Peter Bogdanovich also helped with the cutting of ABC's heavily edited version of *The Last Picture Show*. Yet according to network officials such instances of directors working on their own films are rare, despite a new clause in the standard Directors Guild of America contract which obligates a network, when editing a film for television, to accept the services of the director if he so desires.

Although *The Godfather* pre-dates the new Guild contract, Coppola had negotiated for himself even greater powers, including the right to veto the TV sale. The premiere of *The Godfather—Part II* was a primary consideration in his not exercising the option. Before the editing began at Coppola's studio in San Francisco, he and Traviesas reviewed the film scene by scene to clarify NBC's position on specific deletions. From this point the director was free to produce a film which satisfied both himself and the network. "The difference between what we did and what often happens is that instead of just cutting things out we recut the scene. In other words nothing was really cut out. The emphasis was changed, and different shots were used including out-takes from the original, but all the action was pretty much kept."

This technique was used primarily with scenes of explicit violence, such as the sequence when Michael Corleone commits his first murders. This was the turning point of the story, as well as the dramatic end of the first evening's TV presentation. Although Coppola made the point that diminishing its impact would lessen the effect of the entire broadcast, the network still insisted that it be toned down somewhat. Similarly, he had to

reconstruct the film's single most violent scene, the tollgate assassination of Sonny. 'It was the most difficult because to conform it to the code would take the scene apart altogether. Here was a machine-gunning of a main character, and it was very explicit. To do what had to be done for television would have turned it into a non-scene.' Again the result was a compromise.

The single point on which NBC is completely inflexible is language. All offensive words were removed without debate. Whenever possible, Coppola substituted milder but comparable dialogue, in one case replacing an English expletive with Italian, instead of simply removing unacceptable material. Members of the original cast, notably James Caan as Sonny, were engaged to redub certain lines.

With regard to sexual censorship, John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* has undoubtedly been the most sensitive film shown on American television recently. Although the film was cut without the assistance of its director, the edited print was screened for Schlesinger and the producer Jerome Hellman as a professional courtesy. They were reportedly pleased with what they saw, although the television version had no fewer than one hundred deletions and modifications. As additional insurance, the networks have recently adopted a policy of preceding such films with a warning, known in the industry as an 'advisory legend'.

Coppola believes that the inclusion of an advisory legend in conjunction with appropriate scheduling is the only special handling films should receive for television. Although he cooperated fully with NBC on *The Godfather*, he feels that films should be telecast with no editing at all. 'If a film is harmful to begin with, it's

still going to be harmful. It's the ideas of the film that are harmful.' In any case, Coppola's sense of responsibility to his film transcended his mixed feelings about the issue. 'A lot of people are going to see it, and my attitude was that it was a reality that this editing was going to be done. If it was going to be done by anyone, it was going to be done by me.'

RANDY C. BAER
CHRISTOPHER BAFFER

Tehran

Middle Eastern cinema has often flattered, only to deceive for want of finance, tradition, or the talent required to support such pioneers as Abdelsalam in Egypt and Sadiqu in Kuwait. Three years ago, the discovery of Darioush Mehrjui's work (*The Cow* at Venice, *The Postman* at Cannes) was regarded more as the triumph of a single director than as evidence of a new school of Iranian film-makers.

In fact, domestic production in Iran has been increasing since the 1950s (25 features in 1959/60, 76 in 1971/72, and 90 in 1972/73). Attendances throughout the country have accelerated, and Tehran alone accounts for ticket sales of more than forty million for the city's 128 cinemas. Even Shiraz, a university town near the Persian Gulf and about the size of Oxford, supports 14 cinemas. Admission is cheap, with the most expensive seats in the house costing only 30 pence. One learns with surprise that TV too has a stranglehold over the country. Nearly every family has its black-and-white set (no colour as yet), but young people go as often as four times a week to the movies.

All foreign films are dubbed into Farsi, and apart from predictable blockbusters like *Lawrence of Arabia*, there have been some startling box-office successes—Basil Dearden's *Woman of Straw*, for instance, and Lewis Gilbert's *Friends*. Censorship is at heart akin to British susceptibilities—violence slips through unscathed (and audiences love it), while sex scenes are rigorously excised. During the 1974 Tehran International Film Festival, the screening of *Prince Ehtejab* (the eventual Grand Prix winner) was in doubt until the last moment thanks to certain bureaucrats threatening to eliminate a brief masturbation sequence. Darioush Mehrjui, whose previous work has raised official hackles, has been having problems with his latest film *Mina Cycle* (which concerns blood banks in Tehran's hospitals), and is cheerfully resigned to the fact that he must wait until Cannes or some other festival for outside recognition of the new picture. Still, it must be admitted that Iranian films receive widespread distribution within their country, which is more than can be said for many Western nations.

Within the framework of the Festival (the only event of its kind that is actually staffed by film-

'Prince Ehtejab': suffocation of a victim



makers, like Hagir Daryoush, Bahram Reypoor and Manouchehr Anvar), a major retrospective of Iranian cinema enabled foreign visitors to view 22 features, most of them dating from 1971 onwards. Three new films, *The Deer*, *The Stranger* and *The Fog* and *Prince Ehtejab*, shone in the international competition, together with an extraordinary short, *The Night It Rained* (about a small boy whose courage helped to avert a rail disaster), directed over a period totalling seven years by Kamran Shirdel.

What, then, are the principal themes that link the best Iranian productions of recent years? Certainly not nostalgia for the good old days. In Bahman Farmanara's *Prince Ehtejab*, past and present interlock, often in the same dimension, as an ailing nobleman recalls the ferocity of his ancestors, with the implication that, far from progressing, modern civilisation has merely grown more sophisticated where cruelty and callousness are concerned. Other films, such as Mas'ud Kimiavi's *Earth* (1973), criticise the Iranian love of tradition, a sentiment that in extreme cases breeds hatred of change; while the retired colonel in Nasser Taqva'i's *Serenity in the Presence of Others* despises his daughters for the frivolity and insincerity of their modern life-style. The past is echoed even in the bizarre, exotic causes of death: a young leukemia patient in *Adamak* (1971) commits suicide with the aid of his pet scorpions; the huge, Oliver Hardy figure in *Topoli* (1972) accidentally crushes a woman in his ardour, and an unfortunate victim in *Prince Ehtejab* is stifled beneath a velvet cushion.

But Iran's film-makers are related through their desire to find new styles of expression rather than new subject matter, and outside impulses are strongly felt here. Sohrab Shahid-Sales is the Bresson of Iran, relying in *A Simple Event* and *Still Life* on a minimum of dialogue and action to describe—in a way that transcends documentary—the daily round of the underprivileged. Farmanara's work owes much to Resnais, and Kimiavi's *The Mongols* recalls the Godard of the early sixties. Yet for many critics at Tehran, the revelation was *The Stranger and the Fog*, directed by Bahram Beizai. Two years in the making, it is a vast, symbolist drama, set in some remote historical period (hazy even to Iranians), and bursting at the seams with action and blood-curdling confrontations. Why a young man arrives in a boat to disturb the ritual of a small village, why he is pursued by a band of ominous, black-clad strangers, and why he takes once more to the sea, seems unimportant, for Beizai's dazzling technique, clearly influenced by Kurosawa, sweeps all before it. No other Middle Eastern cinema could sustain such an ambitious and visually exciting production.

PETER COWIE

Children's Festival

The quantity and quality of Iranian films at the Ninth Tehran International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults suggested that Tehran is now as logical a location for a children's film festival as Zagreb is for animation. A dozen of the eighty films in competition were from Iran, almost all produced by the Film Centre of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. The centre has produced nearly fifty films since it began only four years ago, launched rather surprisingly with the profits from Moscow Circus presentations in Tehran and Abadan.

The Centre's latest feature, *The Traveller*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami, observes a fourteen-year-old boy determined to see a soccer match in Tehran, some four hundred kilometres from his home town. Its style recalls the best of De Sica; a comparison with *Shoeshine* would not be exaggerated. Another Centre feature, seen privately, showed an even fiercer concern for the grindingly primitive lot of children growing up on the beaches of the Persian Gulf. Amir Naderi's *Harmonica* tells a Beckett-like fable of a boy's self-enslavement for the privilege of an occasional blow on a mouth-organ. Eventually he hurls it into the sea to recover some self-respect. The beating he is given by the other boys was cut from the film before it was released.

About half of the Centre's films are animated, and already the range and accomplishment of their films for and about children, live and animated, seems second only to the Czechs, who dominated the Festival and took the Grand Prix with *Vinegar*, a hilarious example of a television series by Josef Pinkova.

The Institute is rapidly winning itself as high a reputation in cinema as it has already won in children's book production. With the active patronage of the Empress, seemingly inexhaustible funds and a massive building and development programme, its determination to establish Iran as the key international centre for children's cinema will not be easily resisted.

DEREK HILL

India in Isolation

The international film festival held in India at the end of 1974 was really a last, desperate attempt to get India's distribution circuits back to something suggestive of an international flavour. There is little point in having the largest film industry in the world if home audiences get completely cut off from international cinema. In terms of imports, India's film industry is now somewhere near the smallest in the world.

It started with a silly row in which both sides were to blame. The Americans and British, who had had a free run of their own

cinema circuits after Independence, continued to dump sub-standard product; the Americans more cynically so. The Government of India then brought in a measure which made it compulsory for foreign exhibitors to plough back a percentage of their earnings in the form of co-productions and other forms of local audience and tax benefit. Only James Ivory and Ismail Merchant got some small benefit out of this clause.

But the Government had overlooked a loophole by which foreign circuits could remit all their money home if it was not utilised within seven years. So the Americans, who had earned the most out of India, could hardly be expected to break their necks; they waited quietly for the seven years to end. The Government of India suddenly woke up a few months before the time limit, and this time insisted, in addition, that the Americans also distribute Indian films in the U.S.A. The expected happened. There was an impasse, and this is where the Russians stepped in.

Instead of flooding India with their best films, such as their Shakespeare, they chose feeble imitation James Bond, dreary World War II heroics (of which audiences get more than enough at every Eastern European film week in India) and imitation Bombay-style films from their Asian Republics, which fell flat before better made and more sexy Bombay films, which are the first love of Indians. Matters reached a stage where Russian films played to cinema ushers, a few earnest film critics and the Soviet Embassy staff in Delhi.

Coinciding with this were more foreign exchange difficulties about importing films, and protests by other developing countries, which felt that while India flooded their countries with Bombay films in much the same way that Americans had flooded Indian cinemas, India did not seem to hold even festivals of their films. Egypt was in the forefront of this rebellion.

The final international blow came when the authorities in Paris refused further accreditation for Indian festivals. They were strongly backed by member countries, which felt that festivals in India seldom led to any international trade because of their erratic nature and the inevitable mediocre end-of-year entries playing to fabulous juries which continue to respect India's civilisation and culture. Besides, India itself imported very few films thereafter, in spite of promises.

Together with the slump in new quality films available to film societies, and with even embassies holding fewer cocktail parties with forbidden films thrown in, this made the Indian cinema scene very dreary indeed. In the cinemas, one saw mostly even more dated sub-standard American films which had failed to get release years ago. The British, back to grace, had little to offer because of their own production slump; the French, the Japanese and the Italians did not really care.

Now tempers have cooled. The Indian Government, the American distributors, the disappointed Russians and Eastern Europeans, even the initially triumphant Bombay film industry, now passing through a bad financial slump, are all having second thoughts. The international festival might not seem too mismanaged after the reported confusions at Tehran, its main rival. India still remains something of a cultural trend-setter in the Third World and the cinema cold war still lingers, possibly to India's benefit. Films are still the largest medium of mass entertainment, with TV a very poor relation. For both the cultural elite, in search of avant-garde films from abroad, and the masses, in search of dream sequences, the cinema remains a very important medium. To other nations, India is still a large potential market.

Following on the international festival, 1975 might still prove to be a turning point in the distribution scene. It had better be.

AMITA MALIK

Misadventure in Manchester

The Sixth Symposium on Broadcasting Policy, held in January at the University of Manchester, was bizarre, and for some delegates disturbing. It attracted the usual mixture of media-mongers, educationalists, broadcasters, TV columnists, plus Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, and could easily have been the usual worthy affair of intermittent value. The stated theme was 'the growth of audio-visual literacy and the extent to which our existing educational system should be developing the ability to evaluate television and radio programmes in general.'

It was not until the second day that any comprehensive attempt to define what visual literacy might be was made by Stuart Hood. Hood adopted a semiological approach to probe the messages behind surface images (e.g. the authoritativeness of the Big Ben image in the opening sequence of ITN's News at Ten), and showed convincingly how conventions become laws, as set out in classic textbooks such as *The Grammar of Television*. Despite the deficiencies of semiology (and they were perhaps demonstrated by Ed Buscombe's semiological analysis of TV presentation of football), its crude but effectively systematic methodology, in comparison every other contribution floundered.

Poor Shaun Sutton, the BBC's Head of Drama, obviously unbriefed, analysed *Dr. Who* in terms more appropriate to Victorian children's fiction. 'Well, there's courage' . . . clip of *Dr. Who* showing—courage . . . 'There's fantasy' . . . lo, and an angel appears, courtesy special effects. An audio-tape of children's reactions to the Doctor confirmed the comparative sophistication of their responses. As one boy perceptively remarked, *Dr. Who* wouldn't have any adventures if it



Martin Loeb in Jean Eustache's new film 'Mes Petites Amoureuses', a study of children in provincial France

weren't for his dumb (dolly) assistant. Stereotyping of women (and others) was excused (by Shaun Sutton) because *Dr. Who* is 'entertainment'. Rex Cathcart (former IBA Regional Officer for Northern Ireland) was worried, like any good humanist (literary) critic, about the values imparted by programmes, and on that score awarded the palm to formula-ridden *Star Trek* over *Dr. Who*, for its Christmas cracker morality and it's good intentions.

There *must* have been good intentions at work in the following session—anything else is too sinister to contemplate. If Hood's morning session resuscitated a dying symposium, this one gave it the kiss of death. Opportunistically, so it seemed, Granada Television, the local network, were to record the session, a discussion on three Granada 'access' films, as an Outside Broadcast. Quite how the Symposium organisers could justify a session on the nature of access programming, important as it is, within the context of 'audio-visual literacy' is difficult to say, but they did.

The films included *Cleveland House: Outside In*, made with the cooperation of the staff of a voluntary day centre and those who attend it, chafing under their classification of 'mentally disturbed'; and *Kirkby: A Self Portrait*, with Kirkby inhabitants (and council) attempting to redress the bad image of the town projected by TV. All these groups plus the delegates, so the scenario went, would discuss the effectiveness of the access afforded, only no one (including the producer) appeared to have prior access to the scenario. 'Has television got a guilty conscience?' jeered one Kirkby faction, as they staged a walk-out. 'Confrontation' television of course cannot afford one, and that's what the session turned into.

The Kirkby factions had more

burning problems on their minds than some silly symposium (bad housing, for one) and hogged the afternoon, amid confusion and farce. (Comic relief was briefly provided by a Kirkby councillor's trousers falling down in mid-speech.) In this vituperative, volatile atmosphere the discussion turned to the Cleveland House film—and the violent adolescent girl, focus of the film, broke down as her mother, with whom relations were strained, stood up and spoke intimately about her—the final straw for some delegates, who walked out. Another delegate, with more presence of mind, stopped the taping. The symposium was beyond retrieval.

PAUL MADDEN

Gold Tinted

Driving along the main streets of Rochester, near New York, is like moving through any American small-town movie, but on the outskirts the aspect changes to an almost English greenery, with solid houses set in big gardens. One such is Eastman House, once the home of the founder of Eastman Kodak, now a museum of cinema equipment, photographic apparatus and prints and the home of the archive presided over by James Card. Like Henri Langlois, Card began as a one-man collector in the 1930s. As with all good archivists, his own enthusiasms are reflected in the films he collects, and Eastman House is renowned for its rich store of early American movies and original nitrate, tinted prints. Rushing projectors and cans from one theatre to another, I managed to get through thirty films in four days, in preparation for a London National Film Theatre season in April.

Monta Bell is often referred to as a disciple of Lubitsch, but on the evidence of *Man, Woman and*

Sin (1927), he took a more ruthless view of the kind of reckless encounters Lubitsch often exploited. Young man (John Gilbert) rises from the slums, gets a job on a paper, and enters a disastrous relationship with a fashion reporter (Jeanne Eagels, in rapacious form). Bell's approach is strikingly economical for its period, with elliptical time changes, very few titles, and a gliding camera constantly pointing up contrasts as it manoeuvres around smoky press rooms, salons and the haunted house on the other side of the tracks.

Herbert Brenon's *Peter Pan* (1924) and Maurice Tourneur's *The Blue Bird* (1918) both make masterpieces of American film fantasy out of European material. Brenon finds in the Barrie a poetry which sometimes eludes stage producers; with children (or midgets) in skins impersonating animals, a kind of toyshop decor and the wonderful lighting of James Wong Howe, the old vehicle comes up as fresh as paint. *The Blue Bird* is also a designer's paradise (the remarkable Ben Carré) packed with cinematic effects; the search for the blue bird through grottoes, forests and the shimmering white world of the unborn is staged with a sophistication well ahead of its time, and enhanced by the many-hued tinting.

Some early DeMilles confirmed, once again, the unreliability of much received critical writing. In *Why Change Your Wife?* (1920), he seems well established in Lubitsch territory before the latter arrived in America. It's a triangle soufflé, in which a delightfully dowdy, bespectacled Gloria Swanson is moved to marvellous rages by her husband's infatuation with Bebe Daniels, here revealed as a major comedy actress of the time. An even earlier DeMille (*The Golden Chance*, 1916) transforms basic melodrama into serious marital drama, very precisely acted

and cut and glowing in rich, literally golden tinting.

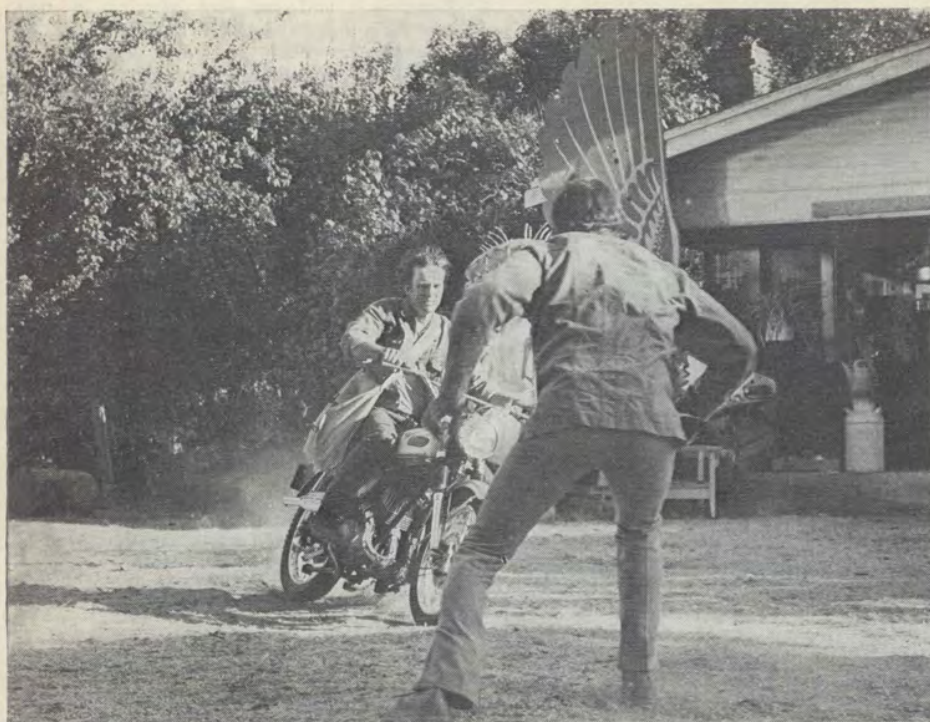
Finally, two non-American surprises. Genina's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1923) is a gutsy, slightly stagebound version, and the most complicated example of hand tinting I have seen, with all the costumes and settings set off in separate colours. *Cyrano* would be inconceivable without its colours, while a German film like *Fährmann Maria* (1936) could not be envisaged in anything other than moody black and white. Made by Frank Wysbar (who later went to America), this is a Murnau-like essay which looks backward to German expressionism and forward to Bergman. Set in a strange, hermetic world of misty swamps and sinister night riders, with a death figure waiting across the river and a ferrywoman played by the enigmatic Sybille Schmitz (from Dreyer's *Vampyr*), Wysbar's film is a real curiosity.

JOHN GILLET

BFI Award, 1974

The British Film Institute Award for 1974 has been made to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Martha*, shown at the NFT's New German Cinema season last October, for combining, in the words of the citation, 'a subversion of Hollywood forms and styles with an abrasive social critique.' Few films had as visibly strong and pronounced an effect on an NFT audience last year, and for many *Martha* was something of a watershed in its prolific director's career—if only because it pushed many of his trademarks (the adoption of Douglas Sirk as a stylistic model, a firmly distanced grasp of social context coupled with a compassion for society's victims, a use of sustained irony often exposing a mordant black humour) to the point where they yielded their most intense contradictions and fusions. Chronicling the marriage of a virgin librarian named Martha Hyer (Margit Carstensen) to a demented sadist (Karl-Heinz Böhm), it revealed—through its depiction of bourgeois marriage as a Gothic horror story—a control over the medium that was startling for its rich palette of pastel colours, its dramatic use of deep-focus, and a splendidly mobile camera.

The Special Award for 1974 went to Arturo Ripstein's *Castle of Purity*, shown in a Mexican Week which also included distinctive work by Alberto Isaac and Felipe Cazals who, with Ripstein, lead the new movements in Mexican cinema. *Castle of Purity*, shot by Alex Phillips, takes a true story of a family confined to their home for eighteen years by an obsessed, deranged husband. Ripstein scrupulously avoids melodramatics as he gently follows his characters through their bad dream, viewing his protagonist (played with a fine control and intensity by Claudio Brook) with a surreal understanding not unworthy of Buñuel.



NIGHT MOVES

Tag Gallagher

'Night Moves': Plot Summary

Private detective Harry Moseby (Gene Hackman) is hired by a rich Los Angeles playgirl (Janet Ward) to find her runaway daughter Dellie (Melanie Griffith). Meanwhile, Harry discovers that his wife Ellen (Susan Clark) is sleeping with another man; he confronts them but leaves the situation unresolved. Following a lead from some movie stuntmen he goes to Florida, where he finds Dellie living incestuously with her ex-stepfather, Tom (John Crawford)—much to the chagrin of Tom's mistress, Paula (Jennifer Warren). Paula sleeps with Harry. But when Dellie, out diving, discovers a corpse in a downed airplane, she is scared into returning to her mother. Back in Los Angeles, Harry starts to sort things out with his wife; and

Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* is a film on two levels. Quite apparently, it is an immensely confusing detective story, à la *The Big Sleep*, but with a bitter ending. Less apparently, *Night Moves* is an existential portrait of post-Watergate America. Penn deliberately sabotages the conventional fiction of his detective yarn, so that its destructive absurdities may reveal the monstrous silliness of its hero's values. The moral of the parable is that trying to solve the problems of the world or the mysteries of Watergate is futile, when we should rather first be trying to understand ourselves.

There are some who have grown disenchanted with Arthur Penn since *Bonnie and Clyde*, his big commercial and critical success, but I admit to preferring his later films, *Alice's Restaurant* and *Little Big Man*. And *Night Moves*. These films seem to constitute a sort of hybrid cinema, in which the traditional narrative expansiveness and cinematic punctuation of the American movie are all but omitted. It is easy to see Penn's kinship with the French New Wave in this respect; but the style is perhaps closer to the Rossellini of *Voyage in Italy*. Penn's editing may seem so hectic, abrupt and perverse on a first viewing that it is easy to overlook the meditative calm of his narrative poise. His films would seem more normal if they would just give that one extra word of explanation, or if the shots would continue just a little longer, or if the transitions were less abrupt.

Generally these are matters of nuance, but in *Night Moves* they reach the macro level. At one point, for example, detective Gene Hackman starts listening to a telephone message. The caller is about to tell him something he wants to know, when Hackman has to switch off the recorder. For the rest of the film we expect him to go back and find out what the message was. He never does. Questioned about this, Penn replied that if it had been important, obviously he would have shown Hackman listening to it. And if one thinks about it, one can eventually figure out what the message was and how it ceases to have any importance. The point is that Penn goes to the opposite extreme from *not* trusting his audience.

The list of Penn's films tells the story of a man of the theatre becoming a man of the cinema. The style becomes increasingly

hears that Dellie has been killed in a movie stunt accident. He learns from one of her lovers, a stuntman named Quentin (James Woods) that the dead pilot she saw was another stuntman, Marv Elman. Harry suspects Quentin of murdering both Elman and Dellie. He chases Quentin to Florida, only to find that he has been murdered by Tom. Harry learns that Tom has been smuggling archaeological finds out of Yucatan, and has Paula sail him out to where the stuff is hidden under water. While Paula is diving a plane appears and lands on the water, killing Paula and crashing into the boat. Harry recognises the drowning pilot as his friend Joey (Edward Binns), the stunt director who was driving the car when Dellie was killed. The film ends with Harry, alone and disabled, sailing around in circles.

visual, as do the ellipses. The actors cease to be histrionic mannequins and become beings stumbling through a world which Penn defines with increasing precision. The nature of this world is apparent in the clash between Penn's gothically American penchant for anarchy and the U.S. as he feels it to be today. Of the post-*Bonnie and Clyde* films, *Alice's Restaurant* looks nostalgically at failure, *Little Big Man* struggles to accept impotence, *Night Moves* opts for non-action and introspection. But Penn continues to rage against the destroyers of the American dream.

I got the impression that we weren't expected to figure out what really happened in *Night Moves*. Or were we?

ARTHUR PENN: Not really. I think you were supposed to take it as much on faith as, let's say, Watergate. You don't understand the plot of Watergate, do you? Why would he keep the tapes? Why in the world, in the biggest of all mysteries, would you keep the most incriminating evidence around? There's a certain eccentricity in almost every interesting case, I think. It doesn't have an explanation, because it's built out of the psychologies of the participants rather than on the circumstantial evidence. So, in *Night Moves*, I wasn't over concerned with making an absolutely watertight case, any more than most of the best detective stories—like *The Big Sleep*—are watertight.

Was the script more lucid in its initial stages?

If anything, a little less lucid. The case was less well plotted, although we didn't pay that much attention to plot. We thought that plot was not going to be achievable, that you were never going to be able to delineate a mystery properly. There was never going to be a way of saying 'Ah-hah!' in the last reel, when you find out that so and so did so and so. And my only excuse or explanation for that is that we're part of a generation which knows there are no solutions.

I think we were trying to counter that impulse towards solutions in this genre of film. Now, whether you can do that with a genre film is a fundamental question. If you're doing a detective story, can you say, 'Yeah, but we're not going to solve it'? I don't know that you can, any more than I know if you can have the good cowboy meet the bad cowboy in the last reel on the street of Laredo and the good cowboy gets shot down. There are certain obligations of the genre. I was tempted to try it in *Night Moves*, saying, let's try it at the level of expectation, and let's alter that level of expectation constantly. And I believe it is possible to do that. I don't know whether *this* film has done it, but I know that we're a conditioned audience for these detective stories.

Night Moves seems a very pessimistic film. In *Mickey One*, for instance, someone says 'Courage is freedom', while in *Night Moves* it would seem to be the opposite. Harry keeps chasing after the solution, but it doesn't do any good.

I think I feel that way about the country. I think I feel that way politically and spiritually and morally at this point. I really think we're bankrupt, and that the Watergate experience was just the *coup de grâce*. We've been drifting into this state for the last twenty years. I can hardly remember an inspirational social philosophy being



'*Night Moves*'. Left and above: confrontations for Gene Hackman, including one with his wife (Susan Clark)

enunciated by a leader almost since Roosevelt—with the exception of certain brief days of the Kennedy administration. That was a tiny little grain that started to grow but was closed off very quickly. With the assassination of both Kennedys, and the dull arrival of the Nixon tribe on the scene, we all went into a kind of induced stupor. And I think that these people in *Night Moves* are some of the mourners of the Kennedy generation. Maybe there's another level for optimism, for younger people, but I don't seem to feel that it's available at this moment in the country. I mean . . . it's ludicrous that Gerald Ford is President and Rockefeller is Vice President, and Wilbur Mills is a drunk . . . It's a bad comedy. It makes Brecht look like farce. Really, it's a silly country.

Are you offering any alternative to despair in your films?

I'm trying to say that the solution lies in some kind of interior investigation, that the detective story is inward rather than outward. That seems to me the central idea of this film: the mystery is inward, and perhaps the solution is inward. We know the mystery is also outside, but I don't think there is any solution outside. And Harry Moseby doesn't make the effort to solve that inward detective story.

Could you be more specific, about the 'inward' detective story?

I mean the identity of his wife, his relation to her, his relation to his father, his sense of his own identity, who he is and what he is. He's a former professional football player—that sort of modern gladiator. He

used to be out there for our delectation and pleasure, but now that he's thrust back on his own means he becomes an instrument of the culture in which he lives, and at that level I think he begins to commit grotesqueries. He recaptures a little girl and brings her back to what is patently an idiotic situation, at her great risk. Then he feels that he has to expiate that sin by finding the solution to the mystery. He thinks he has found it, then thinks he has found it again, then admits the solution just really fell in on top of him. In point of fact, he hasn't even begun to touch the mystery. Indeed, he finds that there's a whole level of mystery beyond the one at the end of the film. So it's really just a series of concentric circles. The outer reality just goes out and out in those circles; the inner reality, and the inner detective story, is there to be examined—if he would examine it.

Had you seen *The Conversation* before making *Night Moves*?

Not until four weeks ago. But I can see why you ask . . . especially since both Gene Hackman characters are named Harry. But *The Conversation* dealt with a character who was clinically psychotic from the start: his obsession is comprehensible as being related to his own independent psychosis. The Harry Moseby of *Night Moves* is neurotic, but I don't think he's crazy; he's trying to act in the most rational fashion he possibly can. That he becomes involved in a series of bizarre and criminal acts is more a testament to the situation in which he finds himself than to his specific character as a man.

Some years ago, you said in an interview that 'the only people who really interest me are the outcasts from society.' Is Harry Moseby an outsider?

No, I think he's very much an insider. In this film I was trying not to deal with an aberrant or a maverick, but with a rather conventional, so-called 'normal' man. I don't think I meant to say that the only people who interest me are outsiders, but that the people I find identification with, the people who make motions and actions I respect, are the outcasts. I thought of *Alice's Restaurant* as being about a series of eccentric individuals, eccentric in an affirmative sense, off centre, outside the line of convention. And certainly *Little Big Man* is made up of outcasts.

But Dustin Hoffman in *Little Big Man* finds a community of sorts, then loses it.

He constantly finds community and loses community. He makes one alliance after another all the way through the picture and they all drop away from him, for no other reason than that he outlives most of the people.

In *Alice's Restaurant* I got the feeling that for you Arlo Guthrie and his friends represented legitimate American values.

I think they represented a better line of the American tradition. Part of the American dream has always been that you can leave the established values and go off and form your own community and society, and that it will be a different society. American history is full of efforts at establishing communities. I was part of one; I went to a college, Black Mountain, which was established somewhat in that vein. The long history of all sorts of religious groups, social groups, apocalyptic groups in the U.S. is legendary; they stretch



'Night Moves': Gene Hackman, Janet Ward

back to the earliest days of the settlers. The idea of the commune and the idea of the police and the draft are counterpoised: they're in opposition to each other and always have been. I know, however, from personal experience that almost every commune is doomed to fail, because it's a wonderful dream that reality has to defeat. That doesn't mean it shouldn't happen, but its transience is built into it. It's as ephemeral as a dream.

When Harry goes down to Florida in *Night Moves* the rather hectic action seems to settle down and become more mellow. Were you posing these scenes as a sort of idyllic alternative?

No, it was really related to the expectations in this kind of detective film, where you think, oh gee, it's going to be about clues, and then, it's about his wife, and then it's going to be about something else. In point of fact, he goes down to Florida just to find this girl, and does find her, and he can't get over how simple and easy it has been. And the temptations of Paula are very strong, and the possibility of staying down there, so there is going to be a strong romantic body of material that you hark back to when she says, near the end, 'Why don't we just keep sailing?' It's a nice option, a romantic fantasy everyone has at some time or another, that you can just get on a boat and sail away with someone. A movie irony.

But Harry could never do that; he's not the kind of guy that ever gives up all that other stuff, takes off his shoes and belt and relaxes . . . Anyone who does stuff like detective work and spy work and CIA work . . . they're just the dregs of the barrel as far as I am concerned. So I guess I approached the Harry Moseby character with that feeling, and I'm sure that pervades the film. I mean, I like Bonnie and Clyde a lot better than I like Harry Moseby.

Are we to assume that he dies in the boat at the end?

I didn't think he died at the end of the movie. I just thought that he was going to go on in concentric circles for the rest of his life. It mattered little whether he died or lived. My expectation is that he would eventually have been rescued . . . He's not going to quit: he may quit the profession of

detective, but he'll go on being an unresolved seeker after some kind of external solution.

The scene in which Harry turns down his wife's invitation to see *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* . . . Do you admire Eric Rohmer?

He's a wonderful film-maker. I was trying to say: don't think of Harry Moseby as being an intellectual in that sense, as in any way a guy who would see that kind of movie. He's an ex-football player, rather a simple man who's now trying to find a new identity in the world. I was trying to delineate him rather quickly. I thought he would be a guy who would not like watching the Rohmer film, would think it was 'like watching paint dry'.

How much of this sort of thing did you put into the script yourself? How closely did you work with the writer?

Very closely, but it was as much his point of view as mine. The script existed as a first draft before I even came into it. There were minor changes, but essentially it is the script that Alan Sharp originally wrote.

When Dellie, the young girl, sees the skeleton in the plane underwater, it scares her into returning to her mother. You seem to like to confront your characters with death.

Somewhat, when you're young, the idea of death strikes you with more swiftness and more terror. I remember in my own youth being astounded by death. I just couldn't believe that that was really the genuine fate of us all. It wasn't until the war that I got used to the idea. Young people confronting the idea of death is a very heavily romantic idea—I don't mean that pejoratively—in that you get a sense of the brevity of your own life. It's part of whatever that so-called being an adult or becoming an adult really means: the ephemeral and swift nature of life.

A little later in the film, just before Harry hears of Dellie's death, he's listening to a telephone message she left for him. But he switches it off just as she is about to tell him something, and he never goes back to hear the rest of the message.

I know, I know. We had that scene and cut it out. What she actually said in the telephone message was, 'I thought you might be curious to know who's in that plane we saw in Florida. It was Marv Elman.' That's all she says. But Harry discovers that in the scene with Quentin anyway, and we found it was slow and redundant. We just operated on the assumption that we all know he would go back and hear the message but that it would not contain anything new, otherwise we would have shown it. And there's one happy result I'll assign to this mistake in judgment we made: I like the fact that it breaks your expectations, that you expect him to go back to the tape and get the truth.

Another thing that bothered me. Joey, the stunt director, arranges a stunt accident in which Dellie is killed. How did he manage to kill her, when he was driving the car himself?

I'm not entirely sure he intended to kill her. I think he just meant to topple the car, to put her in hospital or something for a brief period so that he could finish up his smuggling operation. It was a stunt that got away. As anyone who has been around stuntmen knows, they almost always exceed

the desired effect by about two hundred per cent, including their own safety. In practically every stunt I have done there is always a take which is far, far too excessive. They deliver their own kind of suicidal impulses into it.

And what was Joey doing at the end with the plane?

I have no idea. Oh, I think he was part of the group. Under the guise of being stunt pilots for movies, which gave them a sort of glamorous licence, they were moving stuff out of Mexico. I've been down in Yucatan, and there is a moderate degree of surveillance, but I feel certain that if you were down there shooting a movie you could fly in and out of Mexican air territory without trouble, and move out anything and anything.

Do you think there has been a change in your films since *Bonnie and Clyde*?

I think the films since *Bonnie and Clyde* reflect a surer hand. It doesn't necessarily mean they are better films—I can't make that evaluation—but I feel surer with a movie camera than I did before *Bonnie and Clyde*. The division is clearly there. And I have more trust in film performances than before. I tended to photograph, as in *The Miracle Worker*, at a histrionic level that was very closely associated with the stage. *Mickey One* was rather a transitional film, and *The Chase* is interesting because there is some good acting in it, and some very bad acting, and I was involved with both. I was out of my head during the making of that film, but it was perhaps the picture that brought me back; at least to the degree of saying that I have to do what I do my way, in a certain definite style, or not at all.

You had complete authority on *Night Moves*? The final cut is yours?

Yes.

What sort of control do you have over the colour values of your films, the photographic look?

Some, but you can't control it all that much. You are quite a lot in the hands of the cameraman. I don't have enough technical knowledge to know the stuff that's going into the camera at a given moment, the kind of film stock, the lens, the speed of the lens, the amount of light in footcandles. I don't have time to worry about it. So my greatest concern with the colour is when we start printing. That's when I spend a lot of time at the laboratory.

There is a similarity in the look of your films: dense, lively colours, and stark light and shadow effects.

Yes. Those are strong expressions of my own personal desires. At the outset I tell that to the cameraman and we go from there. I'm not a particular devotee of the more muted colour films that so many people are practising these days. I think that idea of fogging film leaves a lot to be desired.

How do you work with actors?

I get to know about their personal lives, and then I ask them to draw on that every once in a while; a lot of it is confidential. But I try to find parallels in their own lives to the sort of situations they're experiencing in the film, and to give them a point of recognition so that they don't go into a completely alien situation, so that an actor can't say,

'Well, I'm not a detective. I've never done anything like that before.' Everyone has done something in which he spied, or tried to find something out, or made an enquiry discreetly. One gets to know that kind of stuff, and to make reference to it. And on *Night Moves* we spent about ten days during which we were rewriting, but we also sat around a table and first read the script and then did a lot of improvisations: just made up scenes related to scenes that were going to be played in the film later on, sometimes months later. Improvisation is the most natural tool for an actor, to make material personal, to get in touch with it so that it doesn't seem a mile and a half away.

Do you still pull tricks on your actors like putting a short-legged stool underneath them?

Very rarely. I pull tricks on them by trying to alter their expectation about what another actor is going to do. We'll do three or four rehearsals in which that other actor comes in and says, 'Hey, listen, Athens has just fallen.' Pretty soon it gets to be dead news. So you constantly change what the other actor says when he comes in. All good actors like to do that, to upset the level of expectation.

Do you use multiple camera techniques for your rapid cutting?

No. We get, as you say, on one aspect towards one person, and we shoot a wide shot, a medium shot, a close shot, and a very close shot; and then we turn around and go in the other direction. Because once you have adjusted the lights and set up your basic line of progression it goes rather swiftly, and the actors get looser and easier, and if you play around a little with the dialogue that the one who is being photographed is hearing, if you tell the other actor to say something a bit different, you can often produce a result which looks very spontaneous and rather interesting. Actually, the whole conditions of movie-making are practically designed to lull you into self-imitation, mindless repetition, and it is the hardest task of all, to keep the scene alive.

'Night Moves': Jennifer Warren



You change focal lengths a good deal?

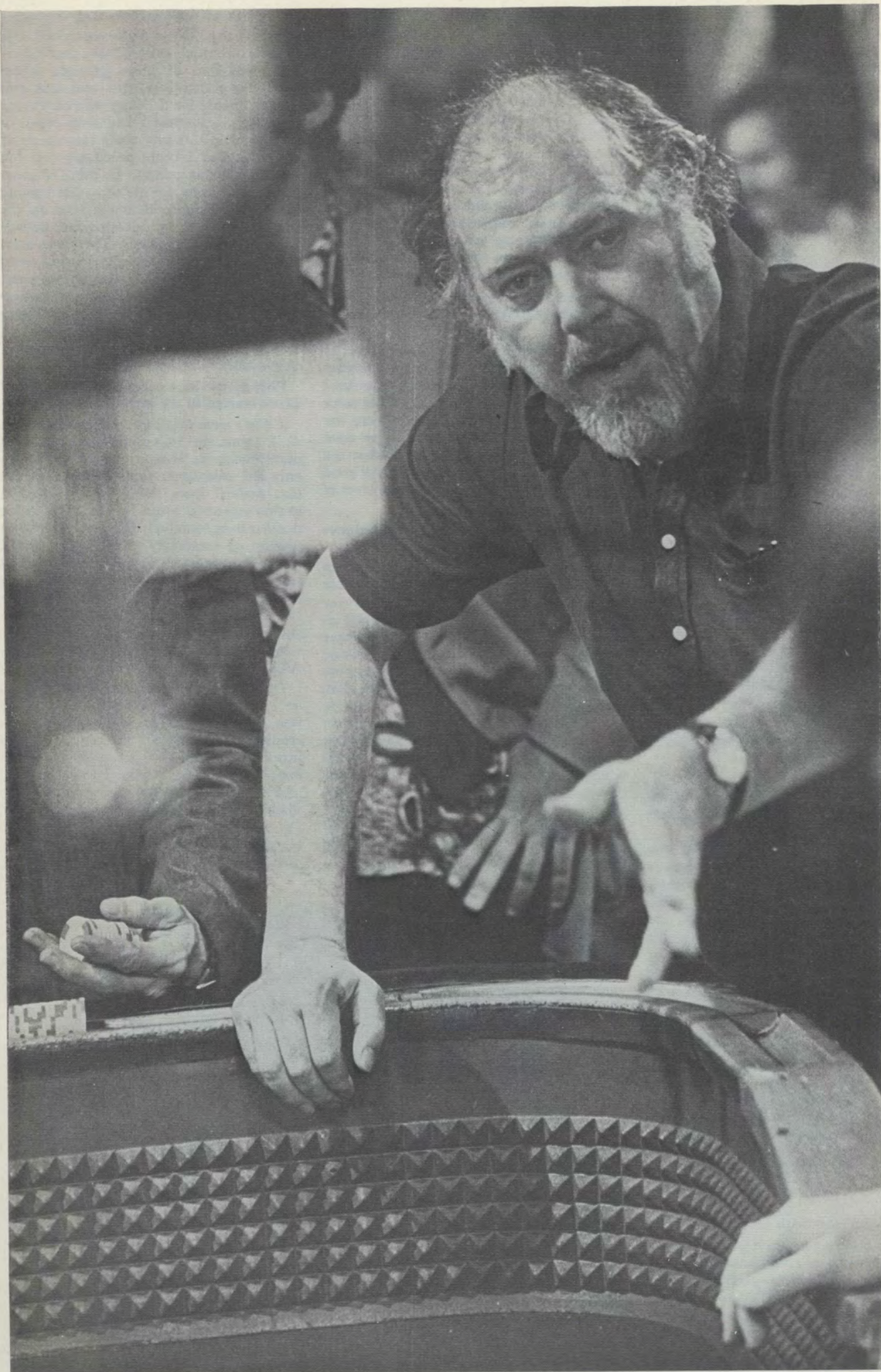
I don't think I was really concerned with camera technique until *Bonnie and Clyde*. That was one of those pictures which developed a complete style and look and tonality in my head before we ever started shooting. So I guess I had some sense of certainty and authority about that movie all the way. And I could practically tell you the lenses I was going to be using in given situations. I knew, for instance, that I would use a very long focal length lens on the scene in which C. W. Moss's father betrays them with Sheriff Hamer. There was a lot of headshaking at the thought that you could possibly have a scene like that at that point in the movie, where you weren't able to hear anybody and everything would be in very wobbly focus. But I thought it would be a very interesting way of treating that kind of classic betrayal scene.

How do you feel about what *Bonnie and Clyde* started in the movie industry?

I don't have any particular feeling about it. I think the imitations are their own punishment, as it were, to the guys who only did imitations. Some people did stuff that derived from *Bonnie and Clyde*, and in that sense you could say that all of us are derived from somebody else's work, or some portion of somebody else's work. And I think the violence would have happened anyway. It wasn't all that extraordinary. You look at *Bonnie and Clyde* now and it's like a ladies' tea party compared to what Peckinpah and quite a few other guys have done.

Have you been influenced by other American film-makers?

Oh, I think everyone has been influenced by Ford and Hawks. But I can't say that I was directly influenced in the way that film students are, because I didn't go to movies much as a kid at all. I had a kind of fright experience at a movie when I was about five, and I didn't go back until I was nearly fifteen. I don't remember what the film was, but I remember going under the seat and not coming out. And then I never went to the movies again for ten or eleven years. ■



IMPROVISATIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN ALTMANVILLE

Jonathan Rosenbaum

[. . .] Unless it is claimed that a pianist's hands move haphazardly up and down the keyboard—and no one would be willing to claim this seriously—it must be admitted that there exists a guiding thought, conscious or subconscious, behind the succession of organised sound patterns . . . Of course, it does happen, and not too infrequently, that an instrumentalist's fingers 'recite' a lesson they have learned; but in such cases there is no reason to talk about creation.

André Hodeir, 'Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence'

I can never think and play at the same time. It's emotionally impossible.

Lennie Tristano, circa 1962

CHARLIE (Elliott Gould): This is the truth. You're an animal lover, right?

SUSAN (Gwen Welles): Yeah.

CHARLIE: Okay, well: the great blue whale, right? You know about a great blue whale?

SUSAN (semi-audible): . . . got that wrestling guy, huh?

CHARLIE: No, it's a big fish, a big fish, there's only two or three left in the world. And the truth—the tongue: of the great blue whale: weighs more: than a full, grown, Afri-can elephant . . .

SUSAN: No, that's not true.

CHARLIE: You don't believe it.

SUSAN: You're just making it up to make me feel better—

CHARLIE: Aw—

SUSAN: —'cause you don't like to see me cry.

CHARLIE: You feel a little better?

SUSAN (sniffing): Yeah, I do.

California Split

The first quote comes from a theorist, the second from a jazz pianist; together they only begin to describe the difficulties and ambiguities attending any effort to describe the aesthetic conditions of improvisation—for audience, improviser and theorist alike. Taking the third quote as a test case, it is hard to know where to begin. Is the dialogue written or improvised? Is the scene—Susan, a prostitute, arrives home in tears after falling for yet another of her clients; Charlie, her flat mate, goes to her room to cheer her up—an integral part of Joseph Walsh's script, or something that Robert Altman and/or Gould and Welles partially or completely concocted on the set?

A sceptic could remark with some justice that it makes no difference: whatever the sources, combinations or relative degrees of calculation and spontaneity, the results on the screen are all that count. But the fact that these results give an unmistakable impression of improvisation—as evidenced by such factors as Gould's loose, evolving syntax and Welles' semi-audible, equally vague reference to 'that wrestling guy'—is a matter of some importance; without it, our responses to the scene would simply not be the same. If Gould's rap and delivery were more polished, our attention would be focused on his whole statement as a single gesture: Charlie spouts nonsense to make

Susan feel better. But in the scene as played, what we observe is the emphatic (if somewhat hamfisted) *exposition* of Charlie's nonsense and Susan's reactions, motored on suspense and an element of risk.

One hesitates to make too much of a scene that is small and, for Altman, unexceptional; but the distinction is crucial. Well-composed, cleanly delivered dialogue would perhaps convey an implied moral judgment: Charlie cheers up Susan, therefore he's 'good'. Throwing this emphasis slightly off-centre, Altman invites us to judge Charlie/Gould, aesthetically as well as morally, on a moment-to-moment basis. Like a matador coordinating his gestures to the unpredictable but inescapable movements of a bull, or a jazz improviser accommodating himself to fellow musicians and chord changes, Charlie/Gould is wriggling his way into the imponderables of a given emotional situation, and to respond directly to his behaviour we have to wriggle accordingly; so, for that matter, does Susan/Welles.

It is also relevant to note the dialogue's context. It immediately follows an exchange between Barbara (Ann Prentiss) and Bill (George Segal) in the adjoining room—

BARBARA: . . . y'know, Charlie's not too good with cops.

BILL: Well, he certainly lets them know it—and is immediately followed by (1) Susan asking Charlie who Bill is and (2) Charlie returning to Ann and Bill and remarking, 'She just fell in love again—she'll be okay in a moment,' thereby clarifying the precise cause of Susan's distress. Thus our view of Charlie with Susan is slightly modified by Barbara and Bill's comments, which present him as tough; and our view of Susan with Charlie is equally affected by our not knowing quite why she's upset.

The difference, in short, between conventional methods and Altman's is one between directness and indirectness, actions and interactions—the actors', the characters', the director's, the scriptwriter's and our own. It is decidedly a group endeavour, and as such, one that lives and breathes in an intangible no-man's-land between 'thinking' and 'playing' for the film-makers, 'thinking' and spontaneous 'reacting' for the audience: the relative strengths of both values are held in perpetual suspension, with new stimuli that can potentially shift the balance coming along at every juncture. From this point of view, anything can affect everything, and no two spectators are responding to precisely the same film—the complete 'text' is common to all, but each reading of it varies according to attentiveness, temperament and perceptual capacity: an individual selection of what is interesting or relevant and what is not.

This is not an approach that Altman can be said to have pursued with any rigorous consistency, although it seems to figure at one level or another in all his films since *Brewster McCloud*. Minor details notwithstanding, it cannot be found to any appreciable degree in the box-office hit that made Altman's name commercially negotiable and the subsequent works financially possible.

A quick survey of Altman's career prior to *MASH* reveals a kind of restless wanderlust that almost seems to anticipate his present methods of composing films. Born in 1924 in Kansas City, Missouri, he

graduated from the local university in mathematical engineering, served in the war as a B-24 pilot, then wrote stories for magazines, radio shows and films with minimal success before returning to his home town, where he spent six years making industrial films. In the mid-Fifties he wrote, directed and produced *The Delinquents*, and co-directed and co-produced *The James Dean Story*. Then came roughly a decade of directing for television—two pilots, and episodes for series ranging from *Whirlbirds* and *Bonanza* to *The Long Hot Summer* and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (which he parted company with after refusing to direct the third script assigned to him). Next came *Countdown*, a science fiction feature directed for Warner Brothers in 1967—and the only pre-*MASH* work by Altman with which I am more than remotely familiar.* Two years later, Altman directed *That Cold Day in the Park* in Vancouver. And later the same year, he was either the 14th, 17th or 18th director—accounts differ—to whom producer Ingo Preminger showed Ring Lardner, Jr.'s script of *MASH*.

MASH is *Mr. Roberts* revised and updated, but not substantially improved. In striking contrast to the movies that follow, it leaves essentially nothing to chance, programming its effects with the ruthless efficiency that one would expect from a skilled TV veteran. Oriental gongs are intermittently rung on the soundtrack to tell the spectator when to laugh; black-comedy interludes of blood-spurting surgery are periodically introduced to maintain a 'serious' war-is-hell backdrop; and for all the apparent verisimilitude of the celebrated overlapping dialogue—controlled by an adept handling of timing and dynamics, where *lack* of inflection becomes a form of emphasis—no one in the bleachers is permitted to miss a single significant line. Too single-minded to include any serious risks in its strategies, it is unswervingly a thesis film which militates for the heady (if headless) consensus of a mob's euphoria as part of its overall message: that fun-loving, honest, proficient surgeons are much healthier and a lot easier to take than bureaucratic, militaristic hypocrites and religious fanatics.

For roughly its first twenty minutes, *MASH* amply demonstrates this 'audacious' postulate; after that, it can only repeat its position *ad infinitum* over a series of tacked-on skits. When Hawkeye (Donald Sutherland) and Trapper John (Elliott Gould) leave for Japan, the structure is already buckling; by the time we reach the football match, the film has clearly been stretched to run on like a TV series (as, indeed, it subsequently has), with the Korean War at this point safely out of sight and out of mind. The sensible way of dealing with death and madness, we are good-naturedly instructed, is to forget about them, while the only way to deal with solitude is to 'join the crowd' like Sally Kellerman's 'Major

*Substantially recut by the studio against Altman's wishes and then further reduced by another half-hour in the English print that I saw, it is difficult to discern much of the director's hand in it, apart from a fleeting use of overlapping dialogue, a talent for composing in wide-screen ratios, and a rather cryptic and neurotic performance by James Caan as an obsessed astronaut.

Hot Lips' (after being subjected to a proper number of qualifying sexual humiliations), or else go mad like Major Burns (Robert Duvall)—who is sent packing early on, in a straitjacket, to make way for further horseplay.

After this sort of high-powered speciousness, *Brewster McCloud* (1970) registers as an honourable failure: a species of crazed doodling with all the awkward, endearing earmarks of a promising 'first' film, in which a director tries to do and say everything at once, trusting to find his coherence in the cutting room. Wildly overlapping allegory, satire, TV burlesque, social protest, demented bird lectures and conventionally dull songs by John Phillips, the film nurtures a dream of 'escape by flight' from convention that is as innocently vague as its hero's, and as predictably doomed. But along the way are some glancing pleasures that suggest some of the achievements to come: the intercut and overlapping use of René Auberjonois' bird lecture in relation to the already fragmented plot, at least until this relationship becomes overly rigid and predictable; the debut of Shelley Duvall, an Altman discovery, as a Texas-grown variant of *Breathless*' Patricia; the bold delivery of certain oddball gags—like the instant splattering of a newspaper headline ('AGNEW: SOCIETY SHOULD DISCARD SOME U.S. PEOPLE') by a bird dropping, or the appearance of a tough hard-leather delinquent sporting a Porky Pig T-shirt—along with some looser forms of humour, such as John Schuck's likeable enactment of a conscientious, semi-retarded Houston cop.

It is only after the exorcism of *Brewster*, in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, that Altman arrives at a fluent and developed style which can support his semi-improvised approach. Henceforth, even his 'mistakes', like *Images*—an old Altman project predating *MASH* that was filmed after *McCabe*—will carry a technical proficiency and assurance that can support many calculated risks.

Writing, when properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: as no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.

Tristram Shandy, Vol. II, Chap. XI

According to me it's a collaborative art. I set a boundary line and framework, but I don't try to fill it all in. If I tried to put in the middle of it everything that was in my imagination, it would be simply that. It would be a very sterile work. So I try to fill it with things I've never seen before, things that come from other people.

Altman in a recent interview

The 'open spaces' that Altman offers to his fellow craftsmen or creates for himself are obviously not identical to the ones that his films offer to audiences, but they are related none the less: the openness and variability of a film's conception can help to encourage an open and variable response.

Broadly speaking, shooting, editing and sound-mixing appear to be regarded by Altman as a process of elucidation, elaboration and discovery as much as one of execution. ('The script will indicate character and situation,' he has remarked, 'what I do comes on top of that.') Actors are occasionally employed without written parts, invited to 'fall in with the material' and create their own roles, or encouraged to alter or expand their scripted parts during rehearsals. Rather than scout every location in advance, Altman sometimes chooses to encounter them only when he arrives with his camera crew.

Equally significant are the 'open spaces' that Altman allows for during shooting and then fills at the editing or sound-mixing stage. The various announcements over the public address system in *MASH*, René Auberjonois' bird lecture in *Brewster* and Leonard Cohen's songs in *McCabe* were all arrived at and introduced long after shooting began; and one might deduce that the use of Susannah York's children's book (*In Search of Unicorns*) in *Images*, the title tune in *The Long Goodbye*, the radio shows in *Thieves Like Us* and Phyllis Shotwell's songs in *California Split* were all partially determined after shooting was over. (Only partially, one assumes, because all four of these 'independent' elements figure briefly within the actions of their respective films.)

Most often, these interventions pass from the role of a foreground commentary (mainly explicit in *Brewster* and *Thieves*; more frequently loose, approximate and dreamy in *McCabe*, *Images*, *The Long Goodbye* and *California Split*) to that of a background murmur whenever the scene's dialogue begins, generally regaining volume over subsequent lulls in the on-screen talk. Bridging scenes or taking up narrative slack while subtly shifting or dispersing an audience's focus, this procedure distances us somewhat from the visuals and discourages sustained identification with the characters—the reverse of the way music is used in *MASH*.

But the same technique creates an impression of overloading in much of *Thieves Like Us*, where the use of Depression radio shows as historical artifacts and ironic commentaries on the characters tends to duplicate points that are already being established by other means (such as the three bank robbers' mythical sense of their own exploits). Sometimes these editorial nudges are even extended beyond simple redundancy: in the central love scene between Bowie (Keith Carradine) and Keechie (Shelley Duvall), which the actors are clearly capable of sustaining by themselves, the unnaturalistic use of the same radio phrase three times—'Thus did Romeo and Juliet consummate their first interview by falling madly in love with each other'—which is apparently intended to punctuate the successive bouts of lovemaking and convey a mood of time suspended, merely comes across as a self-conscious tic.

In *California Split*, on the other hand, the supplementary sound material has an inventive, dynamic function in relation to the action, serving more as a lively contrapuntal counterline than as a static one-to-one gloss. In the second scene at the local poker parlour, one of Shotwell's songs begins loudly over a long shot of the card players, becomes faint and is overtaken by these players' dialogue in medium shot, and then resumes loudness over a close-up of Bill—delineating a dodgy kind of fan-dance in relation to a spectator's diverse routes into the scene. And when Charlie and Bill arrive in Reno, Shotwell's jazzy recitative-with-piano and Charlie's independent free-form rap suddenly (and gratuitously) converge on the phrase 'nobody there'—a striking demonstration of the blind vicissitudes of chance (such as the curious proliferation of elephants and Barbaras), which operate throughout the film on multiple levels.

In all Altman's best films, the emotional

Demented dream of escape by flight: René Auberjonois in 'Brewster McCloud'



centre gravitates around a pronounced feeling of Absence—a sense of opportunities lost, connections missed, kindred spirits divided and scattered—and in many respects, the independent sound material serves to embody some form of this failed utopia: a ‘commentary’ of lyrical idealism abstractly bridging discontinuous characters.

The contrast with *MASH* is again striking; there, the solitary characters are the villains, and even Trapper John is made to appear suspicious and unwholesome until he pulls out his jar of olives and joins the snob elite. In *Brewster, McCabe* and *The Long Goodbye*, membership in a group is generally depicted as a sign of naiveté. The fantasies spun by minor characters about Brewster and McCabe—like the remarks of Philip Marlowe’s candle-dipping neighbours and Marty Augustine’s entourage of faithful hoods—usually come across as the utterances of gullible, fanciful children; in *Images*, the ‘healthy’, ‘public’ response of Hugh (René Auberjonois) to the solitary madness of Cathryn (Susannah York) is shown to be comparably myopic.

In *Thieves Like Us* and *California Split*, these relationships are less fixed and more complex: Bowie, Keechie, Chicamaw and T-Dub in the former and Charlie and Bill in the latter oscillate restlessly between different kinds of solitude and communal living, and strained or frustrated domesticity—broken homes and temporary arrangements—is a keynote in both films. But even here, the minor characters share a visible kinship with the assorted array of cranks who populate *McCabe* and *The Long Goodbye*, each riding on an autonomous wavelength that runs at an oblique angle to everyone else’s. Consider, for instance, Harvey in *California Split*, an old friend whom Bill looks up in a paint store:

HARVEY: Wait a minute! Don’t tell anybody you came, I’m getting a flash. You see, I have a good amount of ESP. I’m blessed with it—my wife kids me about it—but you should catch it when I get these flashes. Let me see how close I can get to what’s goin’ on here. I get—I get that you’re probably back with your old lady . . . an-n-n that you probably want to paint your garage door—perhaps even the whole front of your house—I’m gettin’ the colour . . . it’s a greenish colour. Right, how close did I get?
BILL: I need a loan, Harvey.
HARVEY: A loan?
BILL: Yeah.

And that’s all we ever see of Harvey. Like some of the Flemish peasants in Brueghel’s landscapes and certain topics and individual chapters in *Tristram Shandy*, he emerges briefly in apparent non-relation to his immediate surroundings, but retrospectively blends into an overall pattern of awkward everyday cussedness that comprises an appropriate setting for absurdist-humanist drama. A distant cousin of the eccentrics in Preston Sturges’ gallery of grandiloquent bit players, he is spiritually closer to Dee Mobley (Tom Skerritt) in *Thieves Like Us*, dislocating the screen door on his shack while counting the money in his hand and not quite aware of it, or Ken Samson’s gate attendant in *The Long Goodbye*, impersonating Walter Brennan to a bewildered gangster.



‘McCabe and Mrs. Miller’: Mrs. Miller (Julie Christie) and her girls

The paths of these characters—and countless other examples could be picked from Altman’s menagerie—is directly related to the way that they momentarily take the plot away from the films’ equally displaced heroes; their fumbings are only condensed versions of the clumsy, uncertain relationships of McCabe, Marlowe, the bank robbers of *Thieves* and the gamblers of *California Split* to their respective worlds. John McCabe (Warren Beatty) cracks a raw egg into a double-whisky and gulps it down to impress Constance Miller (Julie Christie), but all she cares to take note of is his ‘cheap jockey-club cologne’; more worldly-wise but similarly lost, she inhabits an opium pipe-dream that is equally inaccessible and unknown to McCabe. Legends and ‘professionals’ to the residents of First Presbyterian Church, they are helpless amateurs when faced with the potential challenges of one another, and in many respects the film they inhabit registers as a wistful ode to that lost potential.

Within this context, the banality of Leonard Cohen’s semi-abstract songs becomes workable through its teasing relationships and non-relationships with the action, postulating mythical archetypes that might alternately ‘fit’ or collide with the characters on the screen. Because these relationships are so fluctuating and ambiguous (e.g., is Constance a ‘travelling lady’?), we are forced to construct our own myths and anti-myths out of them, situating ourselves somewhere—Altman doesn’t specify a precise position—in relation to Cohen’s discourse, the story’s and the characters’.

What might legitimately be regarded as a style whose accents and cadences—expressed through zooms, pans and qualities of light and focus, along with shifting stresses on the soundtrack—convey a dreamy vagueness, is equally a broad invitation to find one’s way in it, to merge with a narrative rather than simply be carried along by it. Thus we are free to notice or not notice Constance’s heart-

shaped money-box (and draw or not draw ‘significant’ conclusions); and when we hear intermittent strains of ‘Beautiful Dreamer’, they are not accompanying her opium sessions but figuring in less obvious places: screeched out on a fiddle in Sheehan’s Saloon while McCabe watches her bolt down a tableful of food, and sung by her newly arrived prostitutes as they splash about in the misty bathhouse.

MCCABE (muttering to himself): . . . I tell ya, sometime—sometimes when I take a look at ya I jus, I jus keep lookin’ and-a lookin’ . . . Long to feel yuh little body up against me so bad I think I’m gonna bust . . . I keep tryin’ to tell ya, in a lotta different ways—just one time you could be sweet without no money around . . . I think I could—well I tell ya somethin’, I got poetry in me. I do. I got poetry in me! . . . but—I ain’t gonna put it down on paper, I ain’t no educated man, I got sense enough not to try . . .

McCabe and Mrs. Miller

MARTY AUGUSTINE (Mark Rydell) (to Marlowe): You remember the night that Jo Ann became ill and we hadda take her to the hospital. Well, as you can see, she’s had extensive treatment—the finest surgeons, had nurses around the clock, best attention—because, as you know, she’s very near and dear to me. And the prognosis is excellent. Excellent. She’s gonna be fine. Now I left the hospital that night, and I was—I was really upset I was—what was I?
JO ANN (Jo Ann Brody): Haunted.
MARTY: What, what?
JO ANN (louder, more distinctly): *Haunted*.
MARTY: That’s it. Haunted! I was haunted—absolutely haunted by the idea that somehow I’d been unfair to her.

The Long Goodbye

As can be partially discerned from the above, inarticulateness and clarity can often register as moral positions in Altman’s films—at least until *California Split*, where the



Julie Christie, Warren Beatty (and money-box) in 'McCabe and Mrs. Miller'; Gwen Welles, George Segal in 'California Split'



whole question of a moral context becomes largely suspended. In the absurdist terrains traversed by McCabe and Marlowe, a hired gun (Hugh Millais) describing how to make profits out of dead Chinamen can be a lot more articulate than the leading citizen of First Presbyterian Church, talking to himself; and a psychotic gangster (Augustine) can enunciate sentences a lot more distinctly and lucidly than Roger Wade (Sterling Hayden), a published novelist—even if the former is describing his guilt feelings after gratuitously smashing a Coke bottle across his girlfriend's face, and the latter is merely trying to communicate affection to his wife through a series of helpless stammers.

Altman's apparent preference here for his tongue-tied characters over their smooth-talking counterparts (the pompous lawyer in *McCabe*, the sinister Dr. Verringer in *Goodbye*) seems to rest on the notion that emotions speak louder than words. And the most serious reproaches that have been levelled against the director—whether for 'laziness', lack of intellectual rigour or incoherent rambling—can mainly be traced back to this bias. But on Altman's behalf, it is worth noting that rigour and clean articulation is not really what he is after: the vagaries of behaviour, the indulging of certain moods and the staging of chance encounters, can be enormously expressive even without the dividends of what critics like to call 'an organic whole'. It is rather like censuring a jazz musician because his improvisations lack the polished form and execution of a classical musician performing a written piece. While it is certainly true that the former is less likely to *achieve* a finished form, there is a different kind of excitement in the way that he tries to achieve it—a way of regarding 'form' as a verb rather than a noun, a process rather than a postulate. And the base-lines established by Altman for isolating and relating different kinds and degrees of coherence are anything but loose.

In Michael Tarantino's accompanying article, a persuasive case is made through concrete evidence that the nearly constant movement of the camera in *The Long Goodbye* affects both our relationship to the film and Marlowe's relationship to the world around him. In what I hope might serve as complementary evidence of that film's formal interest (which surpasses, I believe, that of Altman's other works to date), I would like to show how roughly comparable parameters are at work on the soundtrack, above and beyond the overlapping dialogue—particularly in the extraordinary use of the title tune, a facet of the film that many commentators have taken to be nothing more than a trivial joke.

'The Long Goodbye' is a 32-bar standard by John T. Williams and Johnny Mercer that is performed throughout the film in countless versions, none of which is ever heard in its entirety; out of the dozen or so times that parts of it are sung on the soundtrack—mainly by Marlowe, Marty Augustine and Jack Riley (a pianist in a bar) on-screen or by Jack Sheldon and Clydie King off-screen—most of the lyrics can be pieced together, and some of them are worth quoting:

There's a long goodbye, and it happens every day—

Where some passerby invites your eye

To come her way—
 Even as she smiles a quick hello,
 you've let her go,
 You've let the moment fly—
 Too late, you turn your head . . .
 [...] There's a long goodbye: can you
 recognise the theme?
 On some other street, two people meet
 As in a dream—
 [...] It's too late to try, when a missed
 hello
 Becomes a long goodbye.
 (Copyright by U.A. Music Ltd.)

In simplest thematic terms, this is a commentary on the broken encounters that punctuate the film (and it should be noted that the personal pronouns become masculine whenever Clydie King sings the lyrics, thereby expanding their inclusiveness), beginning with Marlowe and his cat and continuing through virtually every subsequent relationship charted in the plot. As with Cohen's songs in *McCabe*, the relevance to the action is fluctuating but dynamic in relation to our responses, and the same words can suggest different things at different times. In more directly operative terms, the song functions as follows:

1. As a piano improvisation (by the Dave Grusin Trio) in the opening scene, before the actual theme is stated; as Marlowe is woken by his cat and tries to persuade the latter to eat something, he can be heard humming, singing ('Can you recognise the theme?') and whistling various fragments, completely out of synch with the piano and in a different key.

2. Sung by Jack Sheldon as the credits come on, while Terry Lennox (Jim Bouton) drives away from the Malibu Colony (and is momentarily entertained by the gate attendant's Barbara Stanwyck imitation), in a medium-tempo, somewhat Sinatra-like version.

3. Sung by Clydie King (beginning a fresh chorus) in a slower, more moody and lyrical version as Marlowe pulls up at a supermarket to buy catfood, her chorus continued by

4. A soupy muzak version of soaring violins, parodying conventional Hollywood mood music, as Marlowe enters the supermarket (where he's told that he has left the car headlights on), which is continued by

5. Sheldon's version, while Terry drives towards Marlowe's house, proceeding through the next-to-last bar of a chorus, which is completed (and a new chorus begun) by

6. The muzak version in the supermarket (Marlowe to clerk: 'You don't happen to have a cat by any chance—' Clerk: 'Whadda I need a cat for? I got a girl'), continued by

7. Sheldon's version over Terry driving, which is in turn continued by

8. Grusin's piano improvisation as Marlowe returns home, again humming and singing parts of the tune—out of synch, in a different key—along with phrases of his own ('I love the cat').

Subsequent uses include (among many others) a statement of the theme by guitar and castanets over Marlowe and Terry's drive to Mexico; the first four notes sounded whenever Eileen and Roger Wade's gate bell is rung; a version by Morgan Ames' Aluminium Band continuing Clydie King's rendition during the first scene with Marty

Augustine, when the music first comes over a car radio, then is made to sound as though it is coming from the house of Marlowe's hippy neighbours; back in Mexico, as a funeral dirge played by the Tapoztlan Municipal Band while Marlowe speaks to the local coroner; a loud, chaotic and sloppy jazz version played and sung by guests at the Wades' party in Malibu (a scene of social chaos gravitating around Roger Wade, who is emotionally going to pieces); and sung with a slight Jewish lilt by Marty Augustine in his office as he waits for Marlowe to arrive.

The continuities and discontinuities that are established or implied in #1-8—between Marlowe and Terry, home and supermarket, one car's trajectory and another, or one ad lib version over another—are not merely reflections but active instruments of the divisions being set up between these discrete entities, at the same time that a common tune is binding them all together. And the spectator's relationship to the action is being further played with by the multiple shifts in the music's volume throughout most of the above examples, as melody and/or words fade in and out of the soundtrack in relation to the dialogue, passing from 'foreground' to 'background' in a manner somewhat analogous to the camera movements in so far as they repeatedly redefine our focus on and distance from the events taking place—thus continually altering and varying our grasp of them. We are required, in other words, to improvise our own 'Long Goodbye', both figuratively and literally, in order to establish our proximity to all the others.

The shifting volumes of other sound elements—the miaow of Marlowe's cat, the voices of his spaced-out neighbours—are simultaneously altering our impressions of spatial depth and physical separations in these scenes, as is the sound editing of Marlowe's police interrogation, which cuts back and forth between the tinny reverberations in the room he is being 'secretly' observed from to the more full-bodied sound in the room that he occupies.

But the spatial and spiritual distances suggested in the above are modest indeed compared to those which accumulate in the movie's later scenes, beginning with the Wades' disastrous party. In the scenes that follow—Roger's suicide, Marty Augustine's threat to castrate Marlowe, Marlowe's frantic pursuit of a glassy-eyed Eileen Wade until he is run over, his regaining consciousness in the hospital—the sharp divisions between characters reach an intensity that suggests a rapid escalation of neurosis to schizophrenia, a state of total dissociation. This is expressed not only through a shallow sense of space in certain shots (Marlowe and Eileen rushing into the waves after Roger, Marlowe's subsequent chase after Eileen), where characters appear to be traversing enormous distances without advancing anywhere, but even further in the loud, bouncy, cheerful and utterly autonomous jazz piano version of the theme which accompanies Marlowe's frenzied pursuit of Eileen. When he is hit by another car, the sound suddenly dovetails into a few raucous bars near the conclusion of Sheldon's vocal version, with a trumpet blaring over the voice; this in turn is quickly overtaken by a cacophony of overlapping sirens

that fade into a dead silence broken only by maniacal, distant screams from other rooms in the hospital where Marlowe wakes up.

For all its jokey overtones, the scene which ensues is decidedly the most nightmarish in the entire film. On the bed opposite Marlowe's lies a figure wrapped mummy-like, from head to toe, in bandages. After coming to his senses, Marlowe cracks to his room mate, 'You're gonna be okay—I seen all your pictures too' and starts to leave the room, until the figure grunts at him incoherently but insistently, beckoning him over. 'Hey listen, you tell that guy that it don't hurt to die,' Marlowe remarks to the virtual corpse that might as well be him—indeed, is him if we consider how Marlowe stalks senselessly through the remainder of the film. 'Hey, that's the smallest one I've seen,' he goes on, picking up the mummy's miniature harmonica. 'No, listen, I can't,' he explains, 'I gotta tin ear.' He blows a plaintive whine on the harmonica, adds, 'I'll practise—see you later,' and beats his retreat from the room and his dormant *doppelgänger*, evading a nurse with the declaration, 'I'm not Mr. Marlowe, this is Mr. Marlowe here,' with another distant scream of pain from another room heard over his parting words.

In this crucial scene, we have Altman's 'universe', themes and formal procedures reduced to their barest expressions. And if the harmonica and Marlowe's cryptic adoption of it—he is blowing on it again in the movie's closing shot—immediately recalls the harmonica wails of Jean-Pierre Léaud in Jacques Rivette's *Out 1: Spectre* for its reduction of communication itself and the production of 'meaning' to stark essentials, the relationship may not be entirely fortuitous. Rivette has recently expressed an interest in Altman's work which began with *The Long Goodbye*; and the behavioural comparisons of Juliet Berto and Dominique Labourier (or Bulle Ogier and Marie-France Pisier) in Rivette's *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* are not wholly irrelevant to those of Elliott Gould and George Segal (or Ann Prentiss and Gwen Welles) in *California Split*, however much more simplified and 'protected' the Altman-conducted improvisations may be.

Central to the concept of modernism in all the arts is the idea of collaboration—the notion that artist and audience conspire to create the work in its living form, that the experience of making it is in some way coterminous (if far from identical) to the experience of hearing, seeing or reading it. Even at his most venturesome and 'experimental', Altman cannot be described as a director who pursues this notion unequivocally and consistently, in the sense that Tati does in *Playtime* (through visual options) and Rivette does in *Spectre* (through interpretative options); considering the fairly constant way he has remained active in the commercial cinema since *MASH* in 1969—and all the conditions that this fact implies—he cannot really be considered in the same league at all. But virtually alone among his peers, he has opened up the American illusionist cinema to a few of the possibilities inherent in this sort of game—played for limited stakes in controlled situations, but played none the less.

Joseph Losey's new film is based on the novel by Thomas Wiseman, adapted by Wiseman and Tom Stoppard. Glenda Jackson plays the heroine, wife of novelist Michael Caine, who encounters adventurer Helmut Berger while holidaying in Baden Baden, with predictable (and Loseyan) dramatic consequences. Also in the cast: Natalie Delon, Michel Lonsdale, Beatrice Romand. Marcus Richardson plays the couple's little boy (right). Camerawork is by Gerry Fisher and production design by Richard Macdonald



The Romantic Englishwoman







Movement as Metaphor: THE LONG GOODBYE

'The Long Goodbye': Elliott Gould. '... the hard-boiled detective has gone to sleep'

Michael Tarantino

Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is a film in which style is simultaneously used to reinforce and to contradict the content. This 1973 reincarnation of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe is marked by a conscious disregard for plot in favour of mood and characterisation. Altman, along with screenwriter Leigh Brackett and cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, is not concerned with how the case turns out, but with what has happened to Philip Marlowe, since his creation thirty years ago. Marlowe is placed in two separate worlds. One is the 'reality' of the personal situation—one which has turned him inward, withdrawing into himself and losing touch with the outside world. The other world is that of Hollywood—the filmic world from which this character has been derived.

The Long Goodbye is constructed in the form of a satire on the hard-boiled detective film and, at the same time, an extension of that same genre. For, as the film becomes increasingly immersed in references to the film industry itself—'Hooray for Hollywood', the parking lot attendant who impersonates the stars, the dog named Asta who won't get out of Marlowe's way, etc.—Marlowe becomes increasingly alienated from the 'real' world. At the end of the film, it is the character of Philip Marlowe who is bidding us a 'long goodbye' as he skips down the road playing his harmonica. In alternating serious and comic modes throughout the film, Altman elicits a feeling of malaise on the part of the spectator.

He never knows exactly how to react to Marlowe. But what he does realise, as the film progresses, is that Marlowe is, indeed, 'a born loser'. As he moves towards his symbolic end, there is a tension created which smacks of predestination. In the end, the absence of plot, and the concern for character, tips us off with regard to the futility of Marlowe's every act.

An integral part of this stress on atmosphere is the camera movement. The camera is constantly in a state of movement, as evidenced by the fact that there are no more than twenty static shots in the entire film. At its most obvious level, what this movement does is further to extend the feeling of expectation in the viewer. The

film is structured round conversation more than action, and each scene involving two or more people talking steadfastly refuses to adapt to the standardised editing procedures. The movement of the camera is such that the viewer is conscious of it in an overt sense, and it is a decided factor in forming the lines through which the film is to move.

In the generally accepted sense of the term, then, the camera movement in *The Long Goodbye* may be classified as functional—in that it is one of the main contributions to the atmosphere of darkness around which the entire film revolves. But if one examines the film scene by scene, one will see that the overwhelming characteristic of the camera movement is its non-functionality. And this characteristic has a two-sided significance. For, along with its relationship to the deterministic atmosphere which pervades the film, it is also a part of the satire which Altman has enacted on the Hollywood genre film of the Forties. For the camera movement in *The Long Goodbye* impresses one as being a by-product of improvisation and mechanisation. Take, for example, the scene in which Terry Lennox drives up to Marlowe's apartment building after having murdered his wife. The car drives past the camera, which is situated on a crane. As the car continues to the back of the building, and into the extreme background of the shot, the camera remains stationary. Then, as the car's brakelights become barely visible in the distance, the camera zooms in. But all it zooms in on is the space in front of it. The movement stops at a point at which the car is still situated a good distance away from the viewer, who thus retains his distance from the scene while the camera movement reveals nothing.

This type of movement, which occurs throughout the film, is the direct antithesis of the style a director like Howard Hawks would employ in a film such as *The Big Sleep*. Camera movement in Hawks' film was of an extremely economical and functional type. In the 1940s, the hard-boiled detective was just that, and the style had to fit the content. If a clue was there, it was to be located. If a relationship was there, it was to be illustrated. In *The Long Goodbye*, the hard-boiled detective has gone to sleep. Elliott Gould's Marlowe lives in a world that is just as murky as Bogart's, but he does not have the strength, nor the desire, to untangle it. Thus, the style of *The Long Goodbye* communicates this same feeling of operating within a void. The camera does not locate or illustrate anything. It merely goes in and out, moving in the same helplessness circles as its protagonist. While its displacement within the narrative is directly opposed to the style of a Hawks, its ultimate goal is essentially the same—to define the atmosphere in which the characters function.

Generally speaking, the use of the moving camera in *The Long Goodbye* may be divided into two basic categories. The first would include shots in which the camera is actually in motion, especially the tracks and dollies. The second category includes those shots in which the camera is stationary, of which the zoom is the most important. The tracks are used largely for exterior shots—especially for the walkway connecting Marlowe's apartment with the others, and the scenes at the beach outside the novelist

Roger Wade's house. The dollys are used primarily for the interiors—conversations in Marlowe's room, Wade's porch, etc. The zoom is used throughout as a way of linking the disparate spaces. In practically every scene, the zoom lens is used, although the emphasis changes from one scene to another. Between the zoom, the track and the dolly, each scene may be broken up into 'dominants', with one type of shot, or any combination of the three, assuming that role. (What the quantitative emphasis on the zoom does is to accentuate the movement in and out on objects or characters. Thus the right to left or up and down movements of the pan and tilt are virtually eliminated—horizontal movement is accomplished, by and large, by tracking.)

If one accepts the premise that talk rather than action is at the centre of *The Long Goodbye*, then the dolly shot would be self-contained in that centre. The conversations between Marlowe and the other characters are the points at which the camera movement is at its 'intrusive' non-functional apex. By constantly moving the dolly in and out and around the speakers, and utilising the zoom at the same time, the dialogue concurrently takes on the qualities of suspension and animation. It is animated in the sense that it is brought to life—taken out of the dreary context of the narrative and placed within the larger context of the structure of the film. It is suspended in that the audience is aware of how the camera is raised to the eye-level of the characters and how it creates the space in which they move by deleting the superfluous aspects through the use of soft focus. The space in which the conversations take place is shallow rather than deep. In the two examples I have chosen, the dominant shot is that taken by a camera which is mobilised by its position on the dolly. However, in accordance with the overall structure of the film, each scene also contains a number of zooms and/or tracking shots. These shots assume a 'supporting' role here, in that they are used to punctuate or disrupt the movement of the dolly. In other scenes, this formula will be reversed.

Scene 'A'

Marlowe is being questioned by the police at his apartment. The scene starts statically with a series of cuts between the questions and answers. Then the camera, raised to the eye level of the cops, begins to circle with them around Marlowe. The movement is not a following shot, in the strict sense of the term, as the characters are constantly intersecting one another and walking in and out of the frame. The movement creates a feeling of circular malaise, of which Marlowe is the centre. A cop asks a question, and in the middle of it, there is a cut to a close-up of the speaker, in which the camera is already starting to circle around him. The remainder of the scene proceeds thus: (1) Tilt down to Marlowe for his answer. (2) Cut to a medium shot of Marlowe and track in to a close-up. (3) Cut to a two-shot of the cops as the camera wide-angles back from them. (4) Cut to a zoom in on the

door as it closes behind the three characters.

This scene, like the conversation in Marlowe's apartment with Terry Lennox, was probably shot with a two camera set-up. The living room, of course, is a set, with one camera mounted on a dolly and the other on tracks. The circular movements around the characters and the movement towards and away from them not only dynamise the conversation, but draw attention to the movement as movement, with Marlowe as its contemplated object. The scenes in his apartment serve to illustrate the basic paradox of *The Long Goodbye*: the use of 'Hollywood illusionism' to approximate some sort of filmic reality. This paradox is evident in the film as it is played and the film as it is shot—its form and its content. If one thinks of the black atmosphere which engulfs Marlowe's world, one must also think of the absurdity which establishes the presence of that atmosphere.

Another important indicator of the film's intentions may be found in the final shot of Scene 'A' as the door closes on the three characters. The movement of the zoom towards the door is only half completed. It originally starts to close in on the three men leaving the room, but the slammed door blocks this path. This type of strategy will occur throughout the film. Camera movements frequently occur without any beginning or end and appear on the screen past their starting points and blocked from reaching their goals. When Altman cuts, he is usually cutting to and from a movement. Besides supporting the tension set up between one type of reality and Hollywood's interpretation of it, Altman's style lends added emphasis to a completed camera movement—e.g. the zoom into a close-up of Marlowe as he is told that Terry Lennox committed suicide.

Scene 'B'

Roger Wade and Marlowe are seated on the patio outside the beach house. They talk with the sight and sound of the sea in the background.

Although this scene is shot outdoors and on location, it illustrates the same concepts as the interior Scene 'A'. At the beginning of the conversation, the camera is placed at a considerable distance from the characters. As it tracks slowly in, Altman periodically cuts to a shot tracking back in the opposite direction. For example, as the camera tracks in towards Wade, Altman will cut to the shot pulling back from Marlowe. Here, the 'meeting ground' of the shots is their respective 'middles'. As with the conversations in other scenes, there are very few close-ups. When they are used, it is as a reversal of the strategy rather than a denial.

Scene 'B' opens with the camera on tracks, pulling back and moving in simultaneously on Wade and Marlowe. The next part of the scene reverts to medium close-ups of the two figures. Now the camera is on a dolly and circles left and right around Wade. The shots of Marlowe are still track-in shots. On each cut, the camera is at a different position, whether its subject is Wade or Marlowe. The pattern is jagged, but at the same time retains a level of consistency—around Wade and towards

Marlowe. At the end of the scene, the pattern is broken, as a track-in to Marlowe pans to the left, between the two characters, and zooms into the sea. It is the camera movement which dictates the end of the scene, as it did in Scene 'A' by zooming in to a closed door.

This particular shot also predicts the fate of one of its subjects. As the camera tracks in to Marlowe, we expect a cut to the circular movement around Wade. Instead, the camera rushes to the sea, which will soon engulf Wade himself.

This scene illustrates how the various types of camera movement (tracks, dollys and zooms) may be used to complement each other. The tracking shot, however, is used in conjunction with two major motifs of *The Long Goodbye*. One concerns windows and their capacity to 'reframe' or 'reflect' a shot, while the other concerns the architecture of the walkway connecting Marlowe's apartment with the girls' commune across the way. Since these motifs act as a sort of fusion between the narrative and the style, I will hold off discussion of them until later.

The second category of camera movement, then, is that in which the zoom lens is the dominant factor. The major difference between the zoom and the other types of 'inward' shots employed (tracks), is that the zoom retains a greater sense of immediacy. Often, when the camera tracks in towards a character, the movement gives the impression of being weighed down. (This is not to say that all tracking shots in the film are of this type. There are variations within the general structure. Thus, in the scene on the beach between Marlowe and Wade, the movement towards Marlowe seems to be 'faster' and 'lighter' than the movement away from Wade.)

The zooms, however, may almost always be detected by their relative speed. If we combine this aspect with the exclusion of their beginnings and ends, we may be tempted to attribute to them a false quality of functionalism. Like the dolly shots in the conversations, we may see the zooms as an indicator of the predestined fate which seems to await Marlowe and which leads him from non-event to non-event. However, when one keeps using the same tool to lend emphasis to every event, one winds up stripping the importance from everything. But again, the zooms may also be seen as parodies of a genre film which begs to be taken seriously when it has long since lost its grip on the world. Examples 'C' and 'D' were chosen because of their integral relationship to the film's narrative structure, and to the two-sided relationship which the camera movement maintains with that structure.

Scene 'C'

In Marlowe's apartment, Marty Augustine and his thugs look for the money Lennox had stolen. As the camera pans left and right with the thugs, the girls across the way remain visible through the window. As the fast-talking Augustine accuses Marlowe of hiding the money, Altman reverts to the standardised cross-cutting procedures.

Augustine's girl friend comes in at



Shots from scene 'C', in which Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell) and his gang come to Marlowe's flat in search of the missing money; the window, and the girls across the way, is just visible in the first shot. The mood changes with the arrival of the girl (Jo Ann Brody). Stills by Yossi Balanescu

the height of the shouting match. As she sits down and Marty begins to drone on about her beauty, the camera begins a series of zooms, culminating in close-ups of her. After the last zoom-in, the camera reverses the procedure and starts to pull back. Cut to a shot of a hand with a Coke bottle. Cut to the bottle smashing against her face.*

In this scene, the zoom lens is used as a means of setting up and anticipating the act of violence. Altman develops a pattern, and when that pattern is broken, the entire scene explodes. As the camera continually zooms in towards the girl's doll-like face, the soundtrack is filled with the lush ramblings of her gangster boy friend addressing his captive—'Isn't she beautiful, Marlowe?' There is almost a sense of solace to be found in the non-functionality of the movement. It seems that Augustine has given up trying to get Marlowe to talk and the camera is now concentrating on the girl, the new arrival to the scene.

But when the camera pulls back, it touches off in the viewer's mind the reaction that something is amiss. As it pulls back, one expects a change in attitude or a revelation of something outside the reference of the previous screen frame. And before the outward movement is even completed, there is a cut to the hand holding the bottle.

The reaction Altman elicits from the audience at the moment the Coke bottle hits the girl's face is caused by the camera movement making itself evident. For while the other participants in the scene react to the abrupt change in the action, the audience reacts to its stylistic presentation as well. The traditional function of the zoom is to emphasise a point by bringing it closer, and going from the general to the particular. In this scene, the emphasis is achieved by pulling away from the subject and releasing it from the secure hold of the close-up.

Scene 'D'

In Mexico, Marlowe is walking down a dirt road. Zoom in to a medium close-up as he exits frame left. Cut. Zoom in as he goes through a door and it closes behind him. Cut. Track left to follow him. Cut. Track right to follow him. Zoom in to a close-up of Marlowe. Zoom in on Lennox lying on the hammock. Cut to a close-up of Marlowe. Cut to a zoom pulling back from Lennox. Zoom back from Marlowe. Zoom in on Lennox. Zoom in on Marlowe. As Marlowe fires the gun, the camera pulls back from his face. Cut to a static shot of Lennox falling into the pool. Cut to a long shot of Marlowe walking back down the road. He goes out of the frame at the top as Mrs. Wade's car enters on the bottom left-hand portion. As the credits appear on the screen, the camera, which is situated on a crane or hill at this point, pulls back until Marlowe is only a speck at the end of the road.

This final scene is possibly the most illustrative of the film's style. It is a perfect example of how Altman uses a non-

*There is a censor cut here in the British release print of the film.

functional style in a utilitarian way. As in Scene 'C', the zooms are used in a predictive sense. Their sheer volume creates a mood of unease and expectation. And again, the point at which the camera pulls back anticipates the act of violence.

Paradoxically, the camera movement also creates this sense of unease by its futility of gesture. As it keeps zooming in on Marlowe and Lennox, there is an attempt to 'freeze' them, to situate them once and for all in a solitary space. At the beginning of the scene, Marlowe steadfastly denies this attempt; at first, he keeps walking out of the frame as the camera zooms in. After closing the door on this attempt, there are two following shots of him which are decidedly ambiguous. Altman deliberately establishes him at the centre of two conflicting lines of direction, as the camera first tracks from his left and then from his right.

After he meets Lennox, there are two shots in which the camera pulls back and 'nothing' happens. It is at this point, when one has decided that Altman is using a variation on the mode employed in Scene 'C', that the camera pulls back again and Marlowe shoots Lennox. The murder is foreshadowed not by any particular shot, but by the cumulative effect of the movements. Each shot, viewed by itself, is meaningless. It is the *act* which pulls the form together.

Even the epilogue transmits this sense of cumulative disjunction. It begins, once again, with Marlowe walking out of the frame. As he walks down the road, the camera abandons its 'attack' on him and pulls further and further away. As Marlowe stands in the background of the scene, we realise that the sense of immediacy which has been gained by the constant use of the zoom lens has been a false one. We can no longer be brought into contact with this character. His world, and the attempt to recreate it, has proved meaningless.

The final major use of the moving camera to be found in *The Long Goodbye* is in the tracking shots. As I mentioned earlier, they have a connection with two of the major motifs of the film: the walkway between the apartments, and the windows.

The immediate function of the girls who practise yoga across from Marlowe's apartment is to act as non-catalysts. Everyone who comes to see Marlowe immediately mentions his topless neighbours in tones of rapturous astonishment. He, of course, does not really care. This ironic caricature of the 'swinging Seventies' is virtually non-existent to a child of the Forties. Marlowe is more interested in his cat.

The layout of the floor on which Marlowe's apartment and the girls' flat are situated is such that it clearly divides their worlds. As anyone comes out of the elevator and walks to the ramp, he reaches a point at which the apartments are equidistant—Marlowe's to the right and the girls' to the left. Marlowe himself is constantly moving back and forth across this walkway, while the girls never leave their porch. And it is through the use of the tracking shot that the walkway is transformed into a maze, in which Marlowe continually appears and vanishes. The architecture and its presentation will become a metaphor for his personality.



Scene 'F' (see next page). Roger Wade (Sterling Hayden) and his wife Eileen (Nina van Pallandt) are seen arguing through the window; Marlowe is seen in reflection; close-up of the Wades inside the house; as Roger Wade leaves, his wife is visible through the window. Stills by Yossi Balanescu

Scene 'E'

Marlowe comes out of the elevator with a package of food. He walks over to the girls, gives them their brownie mix and then walks back to his own apartment.

On paper, this would seem to be a rather simple scene which could be shot in any number of traditional ways. But the way Altman shoots it transfers that sense of conflicting lines of direction to a scene in which it is not inherently present. As Marlowe comes out of the elevator, the camera is stationed at a point directly in front of it. It then tracks back to follow him, keeping its subject in front of the camera. It is the camera which reaches the centre point of the walkway first; at that point, it tracks in on the approaching Marlowe, who walks past the camera and out of the frame. As Marlowe walks over to the girls' apartment, the camera continues to track in and out until he comes back and again passes it. Then, as he heads towards his own apartment, the camera starts to track in again, only to be stopped by the closed door.

The tracking shots employed on the walkway are not simply follow shots—they are attempts at follow shots. Trying to anticipate the moves of its subject, the camera winds up being outdistanced by him. It is as if the camera is playing games, and cannot 'catch' or restrict its opponent. The zoom lens tried to lend a sense of immediacy to Marlowe's personality; the tracking shots attempt the same with his path. In failing categorically to define it, they suggest that he cannot be restricted by any fixed boundaries, although he is constantly being caught in a loose but tangled web.

The second motif to be found in *The Long Goodbye* is in its use of windows. There are an extraordinary number of scenes photographed through the frame of a window—the girls across from Marlowe's flat, the conversation between Marlowe and the reporter (shot from outside the moving car through the windshield), the discussion between Wade and Dr. Verringer at the rest home as viewed from outside by Marlowe, the interrogation at the police station, etc. The function of the windows is two-fold. First, they lend an additional obstacle to the viewer's comprehension of the scene, in that there is now a physical barrier between him and the characters, as well as a psychological one. The viewer becomes a voyeur who is frustrated in his attempts to bring Marlowe's world into perspective.

By shooting a scene through a window, Altman also plays off a dual presence—for not only do we have two frames for the action (window and screen frame), we have two actions (the one behind the window and the reflected image in front of it). The most striking example of this effect is the scene in which Roger and Eileen Wade argue while Marlowe stands outside on the beach.

Scene 'F'

As the Wades are seen and heard arguing behind the window, Marlowe's reflection is situated between them, as he plays with the waves and looks off into the distance. The scene is shot from outside the window and utilises the frames as a device for dividing the

characters. As the camera zooms in on the Wades, the window retains the reflection of Marlowe. The camera engages in a series of left-right tracks across the width of the picture window. At one point, it passes a post on the outside of the window and cuts to the inside. As Wade leaves the room, the camera begins to track and follow him. Then, there is a cut which reverses the zoom to go outside the window again as Wade comes out of the house. Then the camera zooms in to a medium shot of Mrs. Wade, who is still behind the window. Her husband's image is reflected beside her.*

This scene goes far beyond the economics of being able to represent an added image on the screen through the use of a reflection. It acts as an extension of the *film noir* device of using mirror shots to illustrate various themes. In *The Long Goodbye*, the windows transpose characters into positions which approximate those they assume in reality. Marlowe is reflected between Mr. and Mrs. Wade; Roger Wade is reflected next to his wife. In each case, the window acts as a physical presence which separates the characters and breaks the illusion. The importance of the tracking shots lies in the way they call attention to the illusory juxtaposition of characters. Altman will not hold a shot and dwell on a reflection. He puts the camera in motion, and thus traverses over the frames, which are the solid, non-illusory reminders of the barrier of the window. When he is not tracking, he will zoom inside the window; at which point there will be an invisible cut. However, when he pulls the camera back outside, this invisibility of motion is rendered impossible as soon as the reflected image of the window again comes into view. As with the tracking shots along the walkway, the tracks along the windows of the Wades' house call attention to themselves in order to destroy any facile sense of displacement.

The major use of the moving camera, then, in *The Long Goodbye* is through the dolly, tracking shot and zoom lens. Other camera movements (panning and tilting

*It is interesting to note the similarity to the window shot in Cukor's *A Star Is Born*—a film which also dealt with an insecure man with a dominating wife. It is also noteworthy that both husbands commit suicide by walking at night into the sea, a scene which does not occur in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*.

shots) are basically employed in a revelatory way. Since their use is subordinate, in distance and in scope, to the larger stylistic concerns of the film, one example of each will illustrate my point.

Scene 'G'

Shot of a pair of headphones. Camera pans to the left over a table full of food and flowers, and then wide-angles back to reveal Marlowe and Mrs. Wade.

Scene 'H'

Zoom in on the girls on the porch from their apartment. Tilt down to reveal Marlowe's car below.

In each of these scenes, the purpose of the camera movement is to disclose persons or objects which were not visible in the opening shot. They are as close as Altman comes in the film to purely functional movement. It is because of their functional and revelatory properties that the pans and tilts are used so infrequently. Altman does not like to give us information; he prefers to imply it.

The Long Goodbye is firmly situated within Altman's mania for stripping bare his characters. Marlowe is the spiritual brother to McCabe (*McCabe and Mrs. Miller*) and Bowie (*Thieves Like Us*). In divesting his films of romanticism, Altman's style has often been denigrated as being cold and cynical. These characteristics are, to be sure, present in his attitude—but they are directed towards the atmosphere surrounding his characters rather than the characters themselves. It is by stripping away the illusions that his characters may act, rather than perform.

In *The Long Goodbye*, what is stripped away is a mode of cinema itself. Hollywood represents an attitude—a way of looking at things. Altman perverts this view in his presentation of a major Hollywood staple: the hard-boiled detective. Every time he zooms into a void, or tracks past his subject, he is building up cumulative momentum for the shock at the end of the film. He uses the moving camera in a traditional style to illustrate the 'What' of Marlowe's existence. This same style is then reversed in theory, although the outward motion remains the same, to illustrate the 'Why'. Each camera movement works in two simultaneous modes—the immediate and the ultimate. Hollywood is dead! Long live Hollywood!

Roger Wade joins Marlowe on the beach after scene 'F' between the Wades



DISAPPEARING WORLD

ANTHROPOLOGY ON TELEVISION

David Hancock

The second series of six films in Granada Television's *Disappearing World* was transmitted with great success last November and December. It built and maintained a strong nine o'clock audience, and rapidly came to represent the standard against which many critics measured the documentary efforts of other television companies. One reason for its success was that the series editor, Brian Moser, approached the programmes with a consciousness of the debate surrounding ethnographic film-making and documentary anthropology—an approach which is uncharacteristic of the British and American television networks.

Granada had wanted to make 'anthropological' films for some time, but it wasn't until 1968 that the guidelines for the series were worked out. Denis Forman of Granada has outlined some of these principles: 'We would confine the series to tribal societies which were being studied by anthropologists with whom we could work . . . Our purpose is to show other cultures in such a way as to allow them to be understood.' The first series was transmitted between 1970 and 1973. Most of these films dealt closely with tribal groups whose way of life or very existence was threatened by the influx of modern technological societies. One of the most memorable films was *Last of the Cuiva* (director Brian Moser, photographer Ernest Vincze, anthropologist Bernard Arcand), which documented the complex web of forces and conflicting values pushing the last groups of Cuiva Indians in Colombia towards extinction as an ethnic group.

The second series of *Disappearing World* deals less explicitly with these forces of change and concentrates more on specific events. The films exhibit a much greater diversity in method and content. Brian Moser describes what was intended: 'In every case we have tried to encourage our chief protagonists to speak for themselves . . . It is through them that we should be able to learn something new about societies whose values and customs have often seemed strange and exotic, though in fact they are logical and to be respected.'

Some of the issues the series has had to confront in shaping its conceptual and aesthetic concerns are worth looking at. Within the context of network television, the professional assumptions and audience expectations as to what is a proper subject for a documentary, and what its method of filming and presentation should be, are particularly difficult to question. In doing so, the people behind *Disappearing World* have in some ways set themselves an impossible task. The series has had to serve so many needs, those of television programmers, anthropologists, a nine o'clock audience, the tradition of television journalism films, and the argument about participatory-observational ethnographic film. But it has been this consciousness which has made the films worth watching. To paraphrase Stanley Cavell, the films have had to consider more than one audience: the one they must create, whose conversation they invite; and the one that has created them, whose conversation they invoke.

Anthropologists and film-makers have been co-operating in the production of films for some time. In 1968 the UCLA Ethnographic Film Programme, under the direction of Colin Young and Richard Hawkins, organised a conference to bring anthropologists and film-makers together. It was a stormy session in which what film-makers felt film could do for anthropology and what the anthropologists thought it should do were distinctly at odds. Some felt that anthropologists were naïvely hoping to be rescued from their own subjectivity by a medium whose subjectivity they failed to recognise. This debate has evolved over the years and has produced some working models, some definitions and many varied films.

The *Disappearing World* films seem to be the first attempt at collaboration between film-makers and anthropologists within the context of a television series. This context makes a crucial difference. Ethnographic film-makers have long complained of the restrictions that conventional film lengths and exhibition patterns place on their ability to deal with complex cultural events; but often their work is for a university, in which the films may be screened many times with the contextual benefit of written materials and accompanying lectures. To try to deal with subjects of similar complexity in less than one hour, for a single viewing, and without the benefit of accompanying materials, may well be seen as an impossible task.



'Ongka's Big Moka': a 'Disappearing World' film about the highlands of New Guinea

When documentary film-makers, working outside a television company, worry about the 'audience' in making decisions about their films, they are very often using their own or other film-makers' consciousness as a guideline, rather than any pragmatic information gained in actual screenings. Television programmers, however, have a great deal of feedback about the size and nature of the audience for a certain programme, and are quick to point out that they are not producing programmes for film-makers. The programmers' debate centres round the relative popularity of various kinds of subject matter, while the traditional, 'proper' method of filming and presentation remains unquestioned. As a result, a successful documentary format can become as rigid as a cookie cutter in extracting images in its own shape from the irregularities and multiple facets of its subjects. But because the subjects themselves are often so diverse, and our interest sufficiently high, we continue to try to penetrate this formal smokescreen. Particularly at a time when many peoples' ways of life are rapidly changing and resources to make films are becoming scarcer, it angers film-makers and anthropologists to

see a television programme 'consume' a subject by applying to it a method of journalism and film-making which fails to question its conventions in the light of their own evolving concerns.

There is a strong tradition in television of the 'bring 'em back alive' explorer figure documentary, which treats the people of other cultures as another form of exotic animal life, or as romanticised children living in paradise, or more recently as exploited pawns in a complex ideo-political game. It is a long way from this 'skins and beads' approach to providing an understanding of people of another culture as *people*. There is certainly evidence that we have difficulty doing so with those who live next door. How difficult then with people whose way of life, beliefs, appearance and social systems are totally foreign to us.

One of the definitions of ethnographic film is that it translates one culture for another. Often films which have tried to do this with the aid of anthropologists have conformed to the pattern of traditional humanist documentaries, in which the 'visuals' act to illustrate the interpretative analysis contained in the narration. In this form of 'illustrated radio', the picture and the synchronous sound are allowed to stand on their own only when they are used as a lyrical interlude or when they are considered strong enough in instances of spectacular or ritual behaviour.

When the advocates of direct cinema in the United States and France rejected analytic commentary and the fictional dramatic structure of traditional documentary, the film-makers at first relied heavily on events with an inbuilt crisis structure. Many ethnographic films have similarly relied on an event which provides a dramatic structure within itself and at the same time fulfils the audience's expected need for spectacle. Richard Hawkins' *La Tirana*, about a religious festival in Chile, and Timothy Asch's *The Feast*, about the Yanamamo, are examples. Both films are rooted in specific events; but explicitly prevent us from seeing those events as encompassing or defining the cultures involved. The crucial difficulty comes in

when the event is used as a metaphor for the culture or is seen as definitive of the culture. This is a great problem for television, in which films tend to become definitive of their subjects. When resources are scarce and the precedents are such that a topic like the world's energy problems can be handled in less than an hour, how can one expect much support for the idea of making a series of films about a single group of people living thousands of miles away?

The problem becomes one of context. If we are able to see only one hour of the Mehinacu people of Brazil, as we did in the second series of *Disappearing World*, and all we see is the piqui ritual, then it seems a matter of cultural condescension to call the film *The Mehinacu*, and to treat it as definitive of that culture. Many felt that the BBC series *The Family* was unfair to the British people because it did not represent them well or accurately. In this sense it doesn't matter that such was not the intent of the film-makers, who did, indeed, call it *THE Family*. If the Henley Regatta or a Leeds football match were transmitted as a documentary called *The British*, it would be seen as a ludicrous oversimplification—although the BBC's *Man Alive* attempted something similar in *America the Beautiful*?, which used two beauty pageants as a metaphor for America's cultural values. This tendency toward definitiveness is not only a problem of television but also a vestige of anthropology's colonial origins. Field anthropologists in their own work and relationships continue to force their discipline to confront the issue of ethnocentricity.

The commentary is often used to provide the necessary contextual information. The film-maker may feel the film is being overloaded with information which detracts from its 'filmicness', while the anthropologist may feel there is so much to say that even a solid hour of lecture on the soundtrack would not be enough. But what information is being conveyed and how is it used in the film? One form of commentary provides the factual context which allows us to watch a scene that is self-

revealing. A second, more common, form, not only interprets what we are seeing but also attempts to supply the attitude which we are to take towards the people in the images presented. As an audience with minds of our own, we cannot fail to see that there is a big difference between the two.

When a film seeks out a particular topic that is important to our culture, it is essential that we be given some sense of its importance to people of the culture being filmed. Film is very good at diminishing the importance of what it ignores, and thereby increasing the importance of what it selects. Other people's myths and ritual are tremendously interesting to us, as are our own; but we have our own non-ritual behaviour and relationships with which to balance and contrast these special events. With other cultures we are dependent on the film to provide them, and if it does not we will have difficulty in understanding those ritual participants as people. But to focus a film on everyday non-ritual behaviour in a foreign culture is not an easy decision to take. The film then risks incurring the audience's frustration at not seeing all that exoticism which it knows lies round the corner of the frame.

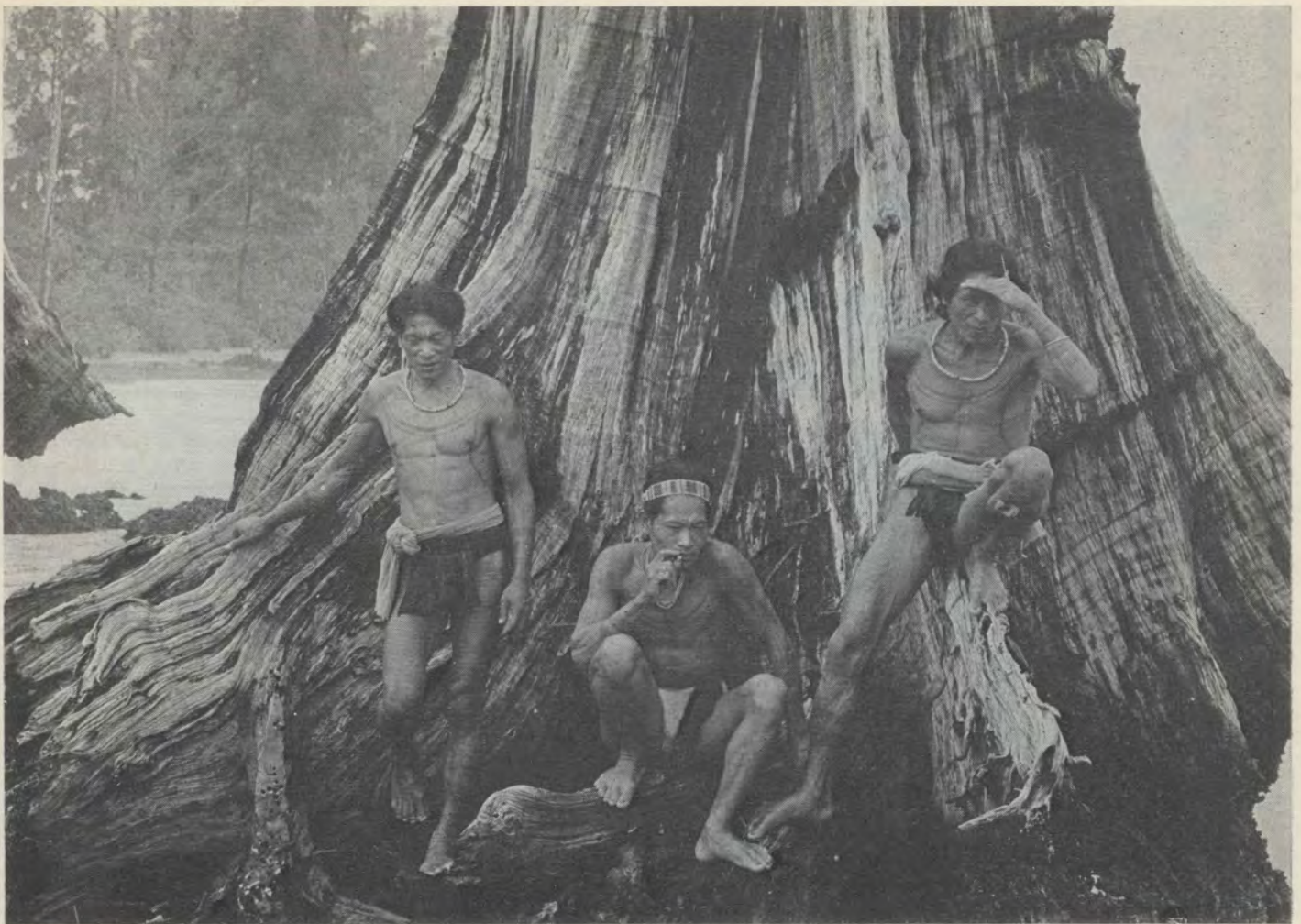
Once initial access has been gained, public events and processes are often the most accessible to the film crew. Mounting a film expedition to a distant and sometimes dangerous place is an expensive and difficult undertaking. With a time slot, and programmers' and audience expectations to fill, it is no wonder that so much ethnographic film concentrates on these exotic aspects. Obviously one does not cry out for a denial of ritual, only that it be placed in a perspective as important as it is to that culture in relation to the non-ritual interaction of individuals. A film crew deposited in a strange cultural situation may possibly never gain access to anything beyond public events. This cannot arbitrarily be taken as a shortcoming. We must respect the desires of a group of people to want to have little to do with a bunch of exotic foreigners coming among them for a few weeks literally to steal a few images.

If we need a non-ritual context, we also need a sense of individuals within an ethnic group. Many ethnographic films still tend to treat people only as part of a generic group. *The Nuer*, by Hilary Harris and George Breitenbach, is a classic example, and there are many others. In them we hear a commentary describing a tribe of people, and for the most part see fragmented shots of unidentified individuals treated interchangeably. The film keeps them at a distance, screened by commentary and treated as a group, not as people with interactions and relationships similar to our own.

Because the *Disappearing World* films are intended for a general television audience, it is fair to say that they use anthropologists for access and information rather than for making strictly anthropological films. Relationships between film-makers and anthropologists have always been full of mutual wariness. The anthropologist is justifiably cautious of letting a film crew into a situation that he has worked hard to gain access to, in case some indiscretion overturns years of work. The film crew, on the other hand, has made a necessary compromise. In return for access they have had to accept that the

'Ongka's Big Moka': Ongka belongs to the Kawelka tribe of New Guinea





'Disappearing World': the Sakuddei, inhabitants of the island of Siberut, near Sumatra

anthropologist's relationship with those people will determine their own and that everything they experience will be passed through that filter. The selection of the anthropologist becomes a crucial decision. A method of working suited to a particular interest in anthropology may be disadvantageous for making a film. Camera crews used to working in sync sound in their own language find it extremely frustrating to be dependent on somebody else for their verbal clues, or to be told that something they want to film is culturally insignificant. One crew, not part of the *Disappearing World* series, spent three months on location arguing every night with the anthropologist, who claimed that people were unimportant and only cultural patterns mattered, while they claimed that if it weren't for people as individuals there would be no cultural patterns. They wanted the film to follow a few individuals. He wanted it to illustrate a general cultural analysis. It couldn't do both.

The greatest hope the second series of *Disappearing World* held out was to bring us closer to these other cultures and their people; to penetrate the distancing of commentary, and to allow us direct access to the behaviour and relationships, the thoughts and statements of specific people, the things which sound film can do more effectively than any other medium. Brian Moser rightly felt that for this it was essential to let people speak for themselves through the use of subtitles. He had to overcome tremendous resistance not only

on the management level but also from the camera crews and editors. The argument that subtitling takes away from the visual beauty and upsets the rhythm of a film is a matter of aesthetics which, while interesting, is largely irrelevant in the context of a series of films which seeks to humanise the presentation of one culture to another.

Obviously subtitles are not a perfect solution, but they allow us more direct access to the people in the film, to their voices and statements, their dignity as individuals. The translation of dialogue is extremely difficult and always yields imperfect results; but at the same time it allows us into a world of interactive behaviour and relationships which has unfortunately been all too rare in ethnographic films. Ironically, establishing the precedent of subtitled dialogue is like opening Pandora's box for a film producer. An audience which becomes sophisticated enough to reject the obvious manipulations of a commentary telling it what the people in the film are like, what they are thinking and how it should feel about them, can easily be frustrated when it senses that the subtitles are only being used to suit the narrative purposes of the film director. Clearly one does not want to read a film from beginning to end; but over-selective subtitling to fit the story-line can work against credibility.

This is particularly true of *Ongka's Big Moka*, about some of the Kawelka people of the highlands of New Guinea, where whole sections of dialogue, some even delivered directly to camera, are not subtitled. The decision of what to title may

almost seem capricious; but what is titled is always to the narrative point. It is an escalating spiral which, once the film-maker accepts the responsibility of being 'up front' with the audience, forces him to abandon one dramatic device or convenient convention after another to maintain credibility. As difficult as this makes it for the film-maker, it pays great dividends for the audience and for the people being filmed. In preventing the packaging of film from robbing the people being filmed of their dignity, it also prevents the denial of the audience's.

The six films of this second series all proved to be excellent, engaging television. They were: a film about how the Mursi people of Ethiopia, in a time of war, make decisions in their leaderless society; a film about the Mehinacu people living in the Xingu National Park in Central Brazil and their rituals surrounding the Piqui tree; a film about the role of women in the society of the Masai people, who are herdsmen living in East Africa; a film about the Sakuddei people, who live on the island of Siberut near Sumatra, cut off from the outside world; a film about the Quechua people who live high in the Andes in Peru and some of whom want their isolated community connected to the rest of the country by a new road; and a film about some of the Kawelka people of the New Guinea highlands, and their gift-giving ceremony or Moka.

The films were careful to present their subjects with respect, and for the most



'The Last of the Cuiva': Brian Moser's film from the first series about the Cuiva Indians of Colombia

part included a diversity of non-ritual behaviour with which to contrast the inevitable ceremonies. They managed, with the possible exception of some of the commentary in the Quechua film, to avoid the tone of patronising familiarity which often flaws not only documentaries, but also the remarks of some anthropologists as they speak of 'their people'. In general the humanist goals of the series were well served by the directors and anthropologists involved; although the degree of methodological and structural responsiveness to specific situations varied greatly.

It is here that the most interesting issues are revealed. In some ways, the aesthetic and methodological growth of the series has lagged behind its conceptual and humanistic development. Much of it comes down to working relationships—those of the crew and the anthropologist with each other and with the people filmed. The nature of these relationships is indicative of the kinds of films that will be made. The term filmmaker has been frequently used; but within the context of British and American television that term does not sufficiently specify the relationships. In *Disappearing World* there was always a director, an anthropologist and a camera operator, as well as sound operators and researchers.

The film about the Mursi is quite explicit about several of these relationships. It is a film which would fit well into Roger Graef's new television series on decision-making. We have an Ethiopian society at war with its neighbours; a society without apparent leaders in which decisions are made demo-

cratically through long debate. The film may at first seem to be about public ritual behaviour; but we soon begin to understand that what is going on is equivalent to the private decision-making process in many other societies. The debating floor and the corridors of power are one. We are in a situation in which several kinds of information would greatly broaden our understanding of the dynamics involved. Those making the film took a daring and unusual choice. They created an extremely sophisticated soundtrack: a dialogue in which the factual basis of the situation and the crew's presence was conversationally presented by the director, Leslie Woodhead, and alternated with an informal interpretative analysis by the anthropologist David Turton. The sync sound of the debaters was a third element on the track, and at the same time their statements were subtitled. This solution comes dangerously close to overloading us with more information than we can handle. But what is interesting is that it comes in response to the audience's needs in relation to the actual situation filmed, and is not merely the formulaic application of an aesthetic device.

This three-sided aspect of the film, in which the human roles of the director, anthropologist and the people are seen as explicit elements of the mosaic, also represents an attempt to deal with one of ethnographic film's most difficult problems. It's obvious that when a film crew is present to record an event its presence affects the event being recorded. There is no such thing as objectivity in film-making, and as such the difference between documentary

and fiction is one of degree, not of kind. Some traditional documentary film-makers have used this argument as a cudgel against the pretensions of *cinéma vérité*, and have gone blithely on making 'documentaries' using all the devices and tricks of fiction. This attitude ignores some important things. Audiences have become more sophisticated in their understanding of film grammar, and fiction film-makers regularly borrow the devices of documentary to gain credibility. As this happens, those devices of necessity become useless to the documentary whose only justification is its credibility.

The convention that the documentary film crew 'isn't there' is one of these useless devices. As any crew can tell you who have awkwardly stood dangling with wires and equipment in the midst of the routine of a faraway village, they often feel themselves to be the ethnographic event rather than the exotic individuals they set out to record. As *Mursi* acknowledges, the event occurs somewhere between the irregular points of the people filming, the anthropologist, the people being filmed and, we might add, the audience. The presence of the crew affects some situations more than others; ritual behaviour is less affected than personal interactions, so no formula or device can categorically deal with the problem. It must be confronted afresh each time. This acknowledgment of subjectivity as part of the film's evidence allows us access to a level of understanding of the event denied us by an unselfconscious film.

It is this attempt to represent the forces at work in the filming situation that makes *Mursi* so engaging. The film is flawed in other ways, some technical; but it never allows us to sit passively; we are forced to take part. The *Mehinacu*, however, avoids the issue entirely. Despite the fact that there is an interview to camera at several points, the film seems content to set us in front of its proscenium arch and let us watch the series of carefully worked out but frustratingly inadequate playlets it creates. Interestingly enough, this film was among the most watched programmes of the series (playing one week after *Mursi*).

We must return to the question of relationships. Who is making the film? At the UCLA ethnographic film conference in 1968, Jean Rouch attacked Asen Baliczi for having Robert Young shoot his *Netzilik Eskimo* series rather than doing it himself. He felt that if the anthropologist didn't do the shooting himself the issue was confused. To have one or two people spending a considerable period of time within a culture has been the approach for many ethnographic films, including Tim Asch and Napoleon Chagnon's Yanomamo films, David and Judith MacDougall's *To Live with Herds* and their recent work among some of the Turkana of Kenya, and John Marshall's films in the Kalahari desert. Aside from the necessity of shorter shooting schedules, the major difference in the filming approach of *Disappearing World* has been the inclusion of a director who is not a camera operator, sound recordist or anthropologist.

From the point of view of the direct cinema, or participatory-observational filmmaker, the use of a director in ethnographic filming is literally a contradiction in terms.

The idea that the film crew directs anything or reconstructs anything is anathema. After the situation has been chosen any mandate comes only from the people and events being filmed. The role the director adopts and his relationship with the camera operator are crucial in determining what kind of film results. An open collaboration, in which the director acts more as a producer and the operator is allowed to respond both thoughtfully as a person and intuitively with the camera, produces a very different kind of film from that which emphasises the director's sense of narrative and his control over what the camera sees.

The tendency towards both these approaches can be seen in two of the films, *Masai Women* and *Ongka's Big Moka*. The camera operators, Charles Stewart on *Masai* and Ernest Vincze on *Ongka*, are probably the best working in British television documentary today. They are capable of providing us, as long as the editor doesn't creatively fragment their footage, with the kind of flowing takes which can encapsulate whole events, and allow us to see human interaction in context. Their shooting, unlike much conventional documentary, tends to respect the continuity and proportion of events instead of rendering disembodied parts of people and chopped up events ready to be used by the editor as visual montage to match the commentary. They also use the zoom lens not merely as a labour-saving elastic telescope but as a device which can show the relation between two people or pieces of action in unbroken continuity and duration. These and other steps towards the maintaining of real time and space within the film frame, when handled by the growing number of sensitive editors, enable us to come closer to the structural integrity of events and relationships.

A high degree of spontaneous responsiveness is absolutely necessary when covering rapidly moving public events with a single camera. The difference between the opposing directorial tendencies can most readily be noted in the way quieter scenes, arrivals, departures and movement from one place to another, are handled.

There's a sense of collaboration between Charles Stewart and director Chris Curling in *Masai Women* which often allows the shooting to be straightforward and flexible. The single perspective of the camera is confident and comfortable, and is not going here and there in an over-complicated attempt to get all the angles for cutting. This lets us see and experience the give and take of a situation, and have a greater sense of the structure of events as they were and not as they were abstracted and fragmented for us. Such responsiveness takes tremendous discipline, the discipline of non-intervention, on the part of the director, and involves sensitivity and agility as well as self-control on the part of the camera operator. One takes great chances in shooting this way because there is no 'covering oneself', and it is obvious when part of a scene is missed, for whatever reason. But the chances are worth it. Every time the operator passes up that easy metaphor, or avoids that beautiful but disembodied close-up, or resists that summing-up shot, he is allowing us to see. It is the relationships and events which are

evident on the screen, rather than the expository control and continuity needs of the director.

In *Ongka's Big Moka*, as in all his work for *Disappearing World*, the director, Charlie Nairn, exhibits a more classical control. One has a sense of research having been done, a narrative line and analysis having been worked out, and film footage being shot to correspond to them. The analysis may be a true and accurate one; but because the film is so closely directed to it, we will never know. We can only accept or reject the director's word for it. The film gives us a curiously formal sense of being 'set up', and even if this is not the case the director must accept the responsibility for giving us that feeling.

Ongka does a great deal of visiting in the film. His movements are often shot as if we were watching a classic fiction film. A sequence showing him approaching the camera, climbing over a fence and continuing on his way is shot from a number of angles and cut together with match cuts giving the impression of unbroken continuity. Curiously this has the opposite effect in documentary to what is intended. It is designed to give a sense of continuity of movement; but somehow here the treatment feels over-complicated, creating a kind of 'stop-and-go' effect. The camera is often there waiting on its tripod before things happen. It makes us suspicious of the director and therefore of what he is telling us in narrative. Since there is no narrative point to be manipulated out of Ongka climbing a fence, why risk bringing our 'set up' worries to bear by creating the feeling that the director is not being 'up front' with us?

People are often only too anxious to do a good job for the film crew. Once they have been asked to do something as simple as walk out of the door a second time, there is no turning back either for them or the director, and their collaboration will rapidly escalate into the creation of a fiction film. It seems a case in which the formal needs of what is taken to be documentary narrative structure take precedence over the structural integrity of the events themselves. It is curious that our inability to change our own formal roles (producer, director, cameraman, anthropologist, etc.) may, at times, make it more difficult for us to document the roles of individuals in other cultures.

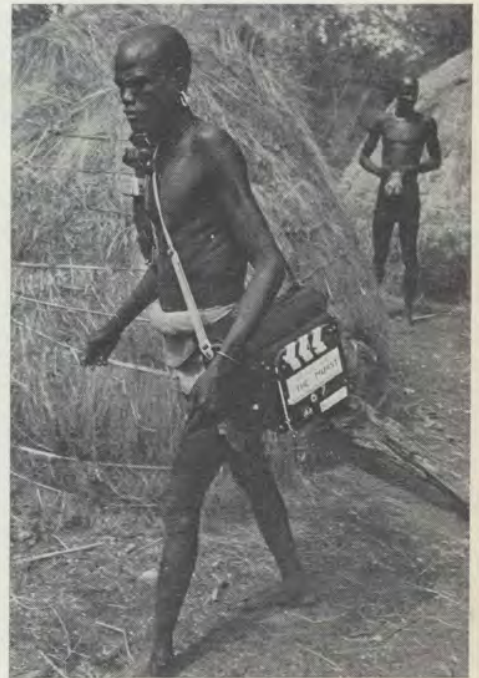
It was fairly early in the work on *Disappearing World* that directors and anthropologists were brought in to work with Brian Moser. To some extent the great diversity in the films is attributable to the degree of control each director was able to exercise over his particular project. On the other hand this may have slowed the overall growth of the series in discovering and developing film methodologies suitable to each situation and consistent with the series' humanist and anthropological concerns. There is a tendency to feel in some of the films in the earlier series that we are back in the familiar territory of films which tell us what is going on and illustrate their analysis with a montage of attractive but fragmented images. When, as an audience, we are locked into a single argument, we can only wonder what events and people lie

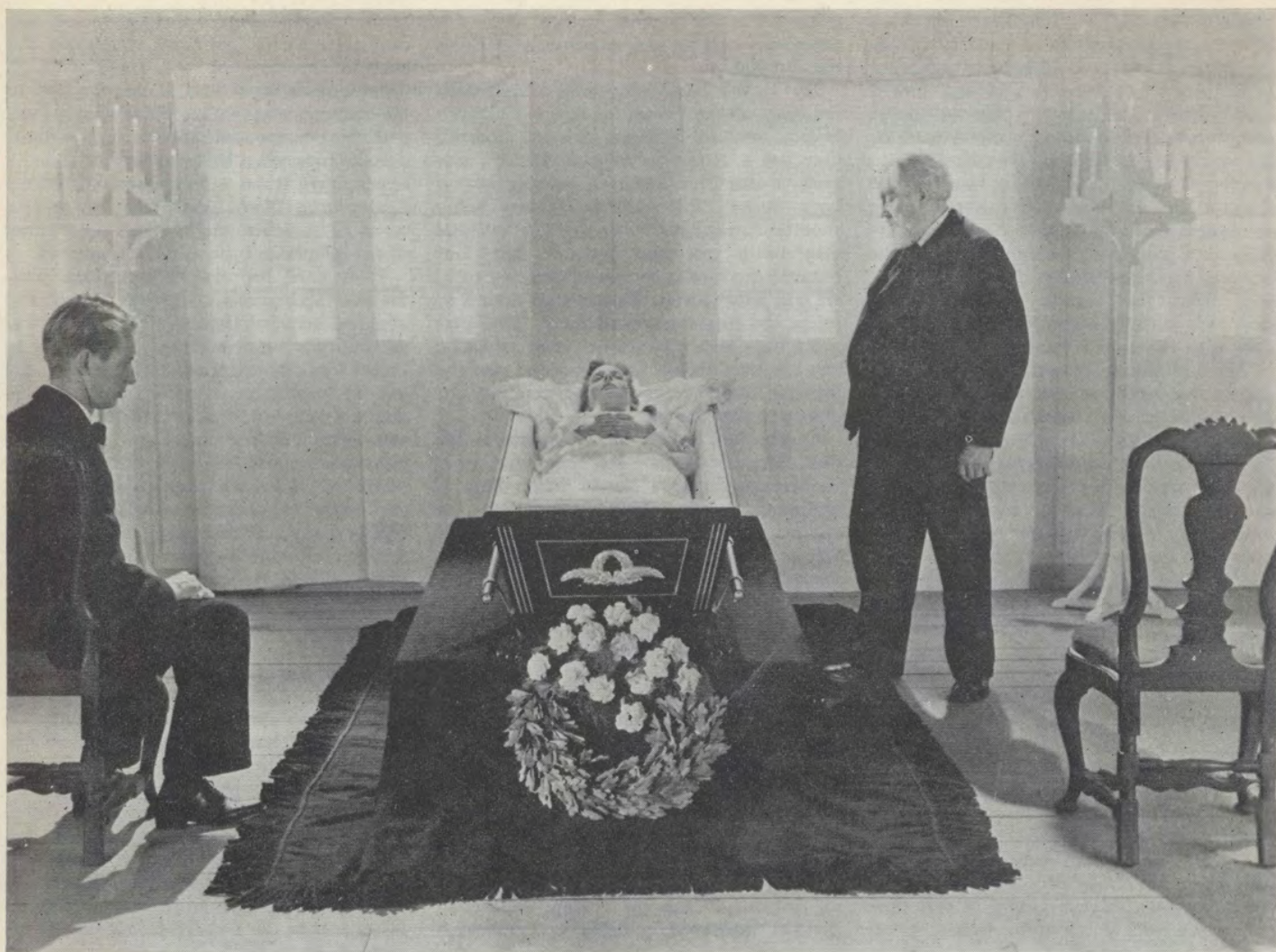
behind the fragmented images we see, and can only accept or reject wholesale the analysis or story-line we hear, based on something as superficial as our reaction to the commentator's voice. We as an audience, and the peoples and cultures in the films, deserve more than this, and we are greedily appreciative when a film, like some of the *Disappearing World* series, begins to respect us as an audience and gives us some sense of the people and the events themselves.

It is hard for classically trained filmmakers to relinquish a degree of control, and abandon some of the more pointed devices of traditional film-making—intercutting to create tension, juxtaposition of images, the use of people as symbols and icons to define a complex situation. All these devices can create a professionally crafted, logically argued, narrative piece of film; but they leave little room for people as individuals, the sense of observed events, all those things that sound film and only sound film can do well—the documentation of specific pieces of behaviour, the ability to present us with a recording of an event in which the subjectivity of that recording is evident and we are left free as an audience to participate and make our own analysis.

All this is a pretty risky business both for the company that sends a crew thousands of miles and has a programme slot to fill, and for the director who doesn't want to come back empty-handed or with a clunker. Not to film to a researched analysis, but to hand over the mandate to the people and events themselves, adds an even greater risk to the already considerable risk of getting a film crew into the situation in the first place. But as can be seen from some of the films, to do so fulfils the series' promise in a much profounder sense. It is a long and untidy journey for a television company to embark on, and is clearly inimical to neat packaging and slick programming. But it is tremendously valuable that the people behind the *Disappearing World* films have taken that first step, and are granting us, the television audience, the respect of allowing us a part in that process. ■

'The Mursi': an Ethiopian aide sets out carrying the clapperboard





'Order': the last sequence

Vladimir Petric **DREYER'S** **CONCEPT OF ABSTRACTION**

In one of Carl Dreyer's essays there is a specific theoretical statement which is repeatedly cited by film critics, but the true meaning of Dreyer's concept has never been sufficiently explicated. In spite of his assertion that he was not a film theorist, but only a director 'proud of my craft', Dreyer nevertheless defined several cinematic principles which have proved essential to modern film expression.

Both practically and theoretically pre-occupied with the stylistic unity of his films, Dreyer arrived at the conclusion that:

'Through the style the artist moulds the many details that make it [the film] whole' . . . and 'Film has possibilities of artistic renewal from *inside*' . . . Or, 'more concisely: the artist must describe inner, not outer life.'

Although he often used dramatic and novelistic texts as the basis for his films, he contended that:

'The manuscript for a film should be regarded only as a rough draft that actors and director can work with further in the studio where the purification and simplification are continued.'

Like all great directors, Dreyer was particularly concerned with the overall composition of his films, and therefore claimed that:

'The style of a film . . . results from many different components' . . . and 'the total rhythm of a film is again an *amalgamation* [my italics] of many different rhythms, from the gliding camera right to the way the lines are read.'

Dreyer's most important theoretical statement (the one most referred to by film critics) demonstrates the creative principle aimed at resolving the problem of the marriage between the concrete and the symbolic in the cinema. To achieve this Dreyer elucidated his own method: 'I can see only one way: *abstraction*. In order not to be misunderstood, I must at once define abstraction as something that demands of the artist to abstract himself from reality in order to strengthen the spiritual content of his work.'

For Dreyer, the principle of abstraction

implies a method by which the spiritual aspect of a film could be manifested. And by the director's work he means the cinematic structure of a film, in which the narrative/dramatic continuity is only one component. Regrettably, most critics try to explain Dreyer's cinematic style by analysing and interpreting solely the literary component of his films, that is, his manuscripts. For example, the recent article by Dai Vaughan, 'Carl Dreyer and the Theme of Choice' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1974), typifies such attempts at the philosophic interpretation of Dreyer's films as if his work existed in the form of literature and not in the form of cinema. This approach stems from the writer's presumption that Dreyer's 'technique [read: cinematic style] is the outward expression of a more fundamental abstraction in which the circumstantial elements of the story [sic!] are eliminated until we are left, not with a spurious symbolism, but with the human essence of the drama.'

One can hardly accept this separation of the form (technique) and content (story), particularly in the case of Dreyer, who

insisted on the 'amalgamation' of all film's components, because 'only when *all* the artistic elements of a film have been welded together so firmly that no single unit can be left out or changed without damaging the whole, only then can film be compared to a piece of architectural art; films which do not satisfy this demand are like those conventional, uninspired houses that one passes by without even noticing.' Since Dreyer's films undoubtedly are not 'conventional, uninspired houses', and because interest in their structure has been growing, it is the theorist's duty to discover how the components are welded together, how the amalgamation of the filmic devices and the literary/dramatic continuity results in the cinematic abstraction which is a *sine qua non* for the film's authentic style.

It is difficult to substantiate the view that the spiritual value of Dreyer's films emerges from the plot or 'the human essence of the drama', rather than from the amalgamation of *all* the given components, including (I repeat: including) the narrative and dramatic constituents, into a cinematic whole which can be experienced only (I repeat: only) by viewing the projected images. Dreyer affirms this in the same essay in which he discusses the concept of abstraction, stating: 'I would like to stress that I am thinking merely of image—people think in images, and images are the primary factor of a film.' In contrast to Dreyer's emphasis on the visual aspect, Dai Vaughan pays 'little attention to Dreyer's technique', contending that it 'has in any case been amply and well analysed by others', although I am curious to know where. Vaughan goes so far as to claim that Dreyer's technique 'serves primarily to intensify our involvement in the reality of the situation.' Such a literary approach to Dreyer reveals a misunderstanding of his creative method and is in contradiction with his theoretical concept, which proclaims that 'many different components, such as the effect of rhythm and composition, the mutual tension of colour, interaction of light and shadow, the gliding rhythm of the camera, combined with the director's conception of his material, decide his style.' Dreyer emphasises that although technique for him is 'a means and not a goal', yet 'the goal has been to give the spectator a *richer* experience.' Conversely, without the technique the spectator would not be able to have such a rich experience in the process of viewing films.

Hence, Dreyer's concept is consistent and clear when it maintains that 'spiritual content' as well as 'inner life' can become active in a film only through a cinematic integration which gives the film-maker 'the chance of replacing objective reality with his own subjective interpretation.' Integration is the means by which the film-maker achieves a stylistic unity, and the closest road to achieve abstraction in cinema is the 'road of simplification' which 'transforms the idea into symbol.' Again, Dreyer has in mind *cinematic* simplification, while he insists that 'this abstraction through simplification' takes place 'in the actual rooms of a film.' The actual rooms of a film are, in fact, sequences tied into an overall cinematic structure which only *as a whole* can reach the necessary degree of abstraction, to help the film-maker to get

'outside of the fence with which naturalism has surrounded this medium.' To achieve this the director must 'use his mind to transfer what *his eyes can see into a vision* [my italics].' Here again the final goal of abstraction is identified with a vision inspired by what the film-maker sees with his eyes, not what he reads.

Dreyer was aware that the process of simplification is common to all the arts, but has to be differently realised in cinema. On one hand, the director 'builds up his film in accordance with his vision, disregarding the reality that inspired him'; but on the other, 'his remodelled reality must still be something the audience can recognise and believe in.' This dichotomy of the film's image and the dialectics of cinema in general denotes the 'essence' of this medium, and is stressed by Maya Deren in a way that is similar to Dreyer's concept of cinematic abstraction.

In her essay 'Cinematography: the Creative Use of Reality' (*Daedalus*, Winter, 1960), Deren discusses the necessity of maintaining 'a delicate balance between what is there [in front of the camera] spontaneously and naturally as evidence of the independent life of actuality, and the persons and activities which are deliberately introduced into the scene.' She introduced two specific terms, 'the authority of reality' and 'the controlled accident', to clarify her claim that a film-maker 'can incorporate natural phenomena into [his or her] own creativity.' These terms correspond to and support Dreyer's assertion that 'the director must be free to transform reality', but 'without losing grip on the world of reality'; 'the abstraction must be made with tact and discretion.' Dreyer expresses his concept of 'abstraction through simplification' without going into specifics, knowing that his works can serve as concrete illustrations of his general theoretical statements.

With this in mind, it is useful to analyse his masterpiece, *Ordet*, about which Dai Vaughan drew conclusions but by merely comparing Kaj Munk's play with Dreyer's published script, being unable to view the film itself. It is hard to believe that someone would risk seriously tackling the question of 'whether this film can take on meaning only within the assumption of Christian belief', and discussing the ideational implication of the film's ending, without *experiencing* its imagery. To Vaughan, the fact that Dreyer dramatically changed Munk's ending and 'set the action entirely within the context of religious belief by abstracting from it those elements which, in a day-to-day world, might hold that belief to question,' seems evidence that Dreyer successfully accomplished abstraction in *Ordet*. But purification and simplification of the literary text is merely the initial step towards the final goal. Dreyer describes it as the method of 'cinematization' of literary works: 'If a Kaj Munk is to be converted into film, then the goal must be to transform the work into a wholly cinematic entity. And my approach to working with Kaj Munk's *The Word* has, therefore, always been and still is: first to possess oneself of Kaj Munk and then forget him.'

The ending of *Ordet* is a particularly good example of the cinematization of a dramatic text, and one of the most beautiful achieve-

ments in cinematic abstraction. Inspired both by the play and by his own experience, Dreyer achieved something which has rarely occurred in this medium: 'transformation of an idea into a symbol' (Dreyer's term), while maintaining 'cinematic authenticity' (my term) on the screen. The term cinematic authenticity implies the 'delicate balance' (Deren's term) between 'remodelled reality' (Dreyer's term) and the 'independent life of reality' (Deren's term) which the film viewer needs 'to recognise and believe in' (Dreyer's term).

Before analysing the closing sequence, it is important to establish all the significant components which Dreyer used in this part of *Ordet*, and then examine the manner in which he combined them. The most recognisable components are: *mise-en-scène* (including actors' gestures), acting, speech, narrative-dramatic development, décor, composition of the shot, lighting, angles, camera movement (gliding), optical transitions (dissolve), the texture of the photography, and sound (including music). Even after the first viewing of the film, it becomes evident that these components have one strong common feature: though each of them contains its own rhythm, they contribute to one 'total rhythm' which prevails over the entire sequence and gives it the 'right mood'. Thus, the amalgamation is accomplished by the contrapuntal interrelation of many different rhythms which creates the overall tempo.

The narrative reveals itself through the following action: the dead heroine (Inger) lies in the coffin in the middle of the parlour; relatives and friends (including the priest and the doctor) are mourning; the husband (Mikkel) is crying; his younger brother (Johannes), mentally disturbed, believes that he can restore Inger to life; he prays to God to give him the Word—the Word that can bring the dead alive; only little Maren, Inger's daughter, believes in miracles and encourages Johannes to 'hurry up a little'; after Johannes mentions the name of Jesus Christ, Inger slowly comes back to life; Mikkel draws Inger up from the coffin and they embrace; she passionately kisses him and asks him about her stillborn child; he tells her that the child 'lives with God', and that 'now life is beginning for us.'

The above would be a brief synopsis of the dramatic event occurring in the final scene of *Ordet*. It also contains dialogue which basically conveys the ideas and mood indicated in the synopsis. If one reads the end of the published script,* one finds, besides the dialogue, only a general indication of the *mise-en-scène*. The other filmic components are not specified in the script; they exist only in the film and can be experienced during the process of screening. The unifying force of all the components lies in the amalgamation of partial rhythms into the overriding funeral tempo that dominates the sequence; all components, filmic and non-filmic, support it in the full sense of the word. Even the pace of the optical transition between the two sequences is perfectly matched, not only in its tempo, but also

**Four Screenplays*. Carl Theodor Dreyer, translated by Oliver Stallybrass. (Thames and Hudson, 1970.)

in the direction of movement. For Dreyer this direction has its own function, just like the function of the rhythm in which 'the lines are read'.

The last shot of the previous sequence shows a black hearse, photographed from a high angle, slowly moving from right to left in a meadow covered with grey grass. The camera pans with the hearse, and symphonic music accompanies the image. This medium long shot very slowly dissolves into a medium shot from a slight high angle of the dead Inger, dressed in white, lying in a coffin with old Borgen standing on the left side of the frame. The camera slowly dollies back to a fuller view of the room. The composition of objects, décor and the 'interaction of light and shadows' reveals a strong visual parallelism: four windows with beams of pearly-white light coming from outside, two tall vertical silver candelabra on both sides of the coffin in the background, two black chairs in the middleground, white glittering floor in the foreground, a black carpet beneath the bier which dominates the middle of the parlour in the centre of the frame. Old Borgen and his son Andres sit on the two chairs, thus forming two dark spots beneath the two additional windows which 'enter' the frame from opposite sides as the camera dollies back. Singing is heard off frame. The following shot depicts the people singing the funeral songs. The camera shows them to be in the 'next room' sitting in disorder, all dressed in black. The camera slowly moves from one person to another as they sit or stand. The atmosphere of these two *milieux* is conveyed predominantly in visual terms, before any dramatic action occurs on the screen.

All the existent components are properly amalgamated and the rhythm of their arrangement in space or their development in time is measured by the essential mood of the shot, which can be described as the state of death. The components are highly stylised but never exaggerated beyond the recognition or belief of the spectator. The amalgamation of the different components, including acting—for the actress's impersonation of a dead person *is* acting—provides the specific mood of the shot. In addition, the simplification of components is reached by the subtle stylisation which generates an appropriate style of the image. The visual simplification, the cinematic amalgamation of all components, and the overall rhythm of this shot results in an abstraction which allows Dreyer to 'replace objective reality with his own subjective interpretation.' More than that, the total structure of the shot pulsates with a *cinematic authenticity* which is attainable only when all the components are fully integrated, be it on the principle of euphony or discord. When this happens, the audience accepts the cinematic vision as 'another reality', and overlooks the existing illogical details; under the 'hypnotic' impact of the *whole*, the audience experiences the screened vision in the same way one experiences a dream *while* it takes place in one's mind.

No doubt, the 'spiritual' content of the entire sequence is strengthened in the very first shot of the finale. Stylistically it is 'purified' on the visual level, while the sound component (i.e., the singing from another



'Ordet': the hearse; old Borgen standing by the coffin; the singers in 'the next room'; Johannes standing by the coffin

room and the distant neighing of the horses) acts as a strong connection between the abstraction of the image and the recognisable reality. The prevailing white tone of the shot is the dominant visual factor whenever the 'dead side' (the room with the coffin) is shown on the screen, in contrast to the 'living side' (the room with the mourners) which is depicted in a black tone with the people scattered. A similar division between a mood of death and a mood of life is indicated in the lighting of the room with the coffin. This aspect of Dreyer's abstraction, achieved by changing the tonality of light within the same environment, will be closely discussed in a following paragraph.

There is, also, a difference in the texture of the photography presenting these two diverse worlds. The shots with the dead

woman are photographically extremely purified, 'clean', geometrically arranged, slightly diffused, with overexposed light reflected on the white walls and coming through the windows like two bright sunny halos, glaring on both sides of the bier on which the coffin and Inger's corpse are placed; the shots with the living people are photographed roughly, with prevailing black areas. From the point of view of 'rhythmic pulse', these two worlds are dialectically counterpoised: the 'dead side' is saturated with stillness, underscored by the steady circles of light beaming on the white walls; the 'life side' unfolds at a monotonous pace, emphasised by hardly perceivable camera movement and sharp black-and-white contrast. The camera often follows the *mise-en-scène* of the 'living' people from a point of view that is identical to Inger's as she lies in the coffin. In effect, the camera is positioned on top of the coffin so that Inger's covered legs are seen in the lower part of the frame. As the camera pans left and right or moves forward, it shows people always from a slightly low angle so that a segment of the wooden ceiling is visible in the top of the frame.

Obviously, spectators identify with the 'dead side' of the film's finale. Dreyer achieves this startling effect through concrete cinematic terms. All the shots in which the coffin appears are suffused with a visual empathy that immediately seizes the spectator and captivates him by the painterly configuration of light and darkness which, in turn, creates a hypnotic mood of stillness and harmony. The change of angles plays an important part in this process of the viewer's identification. The long shots of the 'dead side' of the room are never preceded by a close-up of living characters, which connotes that these shots represent the third person's viewpoint. Only the medium shots of dead Inger are preceded by the close-ups of the living people when they look at her. In contrast, the long shots of the 'living side' of the room, photographed from the dead Inger's viewpoint, are not introduced by her close-up, although the spectator infers that they are taken from Inger's position. As such they represent a view which is located somewhere *between* the third person's view and dead Inger's view. In other words, the audience is stimulated to anticipate the mood of death, and at the same time to associate itself with the serene atmosphere of the bright aspect of the room. Hence, spectators accept this mesmeric imagery as the preferable side, equating death with 'another life', which is more alluring than reality. The viewer could not experience such a 'strange' feeling without the unique cinematic impact ('overtone') produced by the amalgamation of components, transmuting this sequence into cinematic abstraction which Eisenstein refers to as 'the fourth dimension'.

In general, the shots with the dead Inger are very long in duration, and are interpolated with a few close-ups and medium shots of other people in the room, which function as rhythmic visual accents among the long takes in which the dramatic tension is emphasised by the slow gliding of the camera. For example, the long take in which Peter the Tailor, who is standing in front of Inger's body, agrees to give his daughter,

Anne, to his former mortal enemy's son, Andres, is photographed from Inger's viewpoint (at a low angle) as if she were patiently watching every movement and gesture of the living. As Andres and Anne take each other's hand and walk left to the corner of the room, the camera pans with them (suddenly accompanied by slow-paced music), and then returns to the group near the coffin and 'glides' in the opposite direction following old Borgen as he walks to the door.

At the moment when the mentally disturbed Johannes enters the room, the montage changes pace. Johannes first comes to the bottom of the coffin, then moves closer to the dead Inger. The composition of this shot (photographed from the side of the coffin) is revealing in itself: the dead Inger is lying in the coffin whose position is parallel with the bottom of the frame; the tall silver candelabrum, with seven lit candles, is placed on the left side of the frame; Inger's husband Mikkel is bent over his wife's head; above him a circular beam of light reflects off the white wall in the background; Johannes stands still on the right side of the frame. The point of view in this shot is entirely different from the frontal viewpoint in other shots with the coffin which occupies the centre of the frame and is placed against the narrow wall between the four radiant windows in the background.

Johannes returns to the bottom of the coffin, followed by the camera's pan in a medium shot. He looks upward while praying to God to give him the magic Word. Then little Maren, followed by the camera and photographed from Inger's viewpoint at a low angle, walks to Johannes as he prays. Johannes' prayer is visually 'interrupted' by two close-ups of Maren, both photographed from Inger's point of view, showing her face looking down at her dead mother. Another 'one shot' (a shot in which only one person is present within the frame) is the medium close-up of Inger lying in the coffin. It is photographed from a very high angle (higher than the level of Maren's eye) so that it simultaneously implies Maren's viewpoint and gives the optical impression that Inger is standing while Johannes' word 'Arise!' is heard off. With the reduced perspective and elimination of surrounding objects from the frame, this close-up achieves cinematic abstraction by, to use Dreyer's formulation, 'deliberate elimination of atmospheric perspective, by giving up the much sought-after photographic effect of depth and distance.' As a visual unit, this shot—because of its composition, the lighting, and the camera angle—emphasises the mood which brings the audience into a 'hypnotic' state of mind; there is nothing in this scene that interrupts the delicate balance between the 'authority of reality' and the film-maker's 'subjective interpretation'.

Hence, the fact that Johannes' behaviour at the end seems more 'normal' than at the beginning of the film is designed to establish—through amalgamation with the other components—the spiritual mood of the finale. Johannes' serenity of gesture and movement introduces a necessary transcendental element within the *milieu funèbre*, among the mourners in the room. Together with the little girl, Johannes acts as a

human 'medium' between the 'world of life' and the 'world of death'. He even says that only children can understand how a dead person can be brought back to life! In the context of the 'supernatural' atmosphere of the closing scene, Johannes' latest comportment does not simply appear less disturbed, but transcends into an ideological component of the overall stylistic unity of the sequence. This may be studied as the most obvious example of Dreyer's capacity to integrate an essentially non-filmic component (acting) into the full cinematic entity, thus providing 'a richer experience' for the spectator.

Significantly, Maren's smiling face (an acting component) is brought into the sequence as a counter-force, i.e. one whose rhythm is totally at odds with the rhythm of other components. Dreyer interpolates this 'light' element within the dark atmosphere of the scene in a manner which 'the spectator will believe in'. If he were to include a smile from one of the adults, such a shot would disrupt the dominant mood. This proves that the amalgamation does not make it necessary for all components of the film to synchronise and mesh with each other; on the contrary, they may often contradict each other in order to emphasise a contrapuntal interrelationship between variant components. Hence, amalgamation—or integration—in cinema is not equivalent to the principle of organic

'Order': 'two shot' of Borgen and Peter; two close-ups of the child, Maren



aesthetics which insists on the harmonious arrangement of all the elements in a work of art. It is crucial to stress that amalgamation indicates all sorts of relationships between the many components which achieve their own unity, be it harmonic or contrapuntal, classically aesthetic or non-aesthetic, always dependent on the contextual/cinematic meaning/impact of a film.

At this point, the cinematic authenticity of a supernatural atmosphere in *Ordet* is already established by stylistic balance of the existent components. The result is a new rhythm which corresponds to the 'inner life' of the characters and the 'right mood' of the event. Saturated with an intensive cinematic vision, the spectator anticipates that the dead Inger may well come back to life, because he has been brought to a hypnotic state of mind in which he is more involved with the spiritual meaning of the event than with its logical development. Thus, the 'fence of naturalism' is broken from inside and the abstraction begins to transmute the director's idea into a symbol, a *cinematic symbol* that is not deprived of its connection with the world of reality, and whose impact stems from a complete marriage of the abstract and the concrete.

The building of the spiritual mood has yet to reach its climax. The medium close-up of Inger lying in the coffin suffused with hazy, effluent light coming from the windows, which are excluded from the shot, is photographed from above, with her hands outstretched, so that she is seen lying motionless in the coffin (again, cut in perspective) on a white pillow whose edges are wrinkled and which seems to float in the air. Suddenly, but not unexpectedly, Inger's folded hands begin slowly to unclasp. The motion is hardly perceptible and, after a moment, the movement ceases and she continues to lie rigid with her arms outstretched. There follows a 'two shot' of Borgen and Peter looking upward and frame left, with surprise and tension on their faces. The next shot is a close-up of Maren (seen from a low angle) as she looks down toward the coffin. Her face at first appears stunned (i.e., continues the emotional attitude conveyed in the previous shot). Then she begins to smile and slowly turns her head to the right, i.e., toward Johannes (whose left hand is seen in the right part of the frame) and finally moves her head back to concentrate on her mother.

In the next shot, Mikkel, dressed in black, enters the frame as if coming from another, gloomy world. He cautiously bends over Inger and calls out her name. In the same shot she slowly opens her eyes, lifts her hands up, and embraces him, cheek to cheek, against the bright light coming from the background. The light on their faces is natural; they talk normally while she turns her head to her husband and begins to kiss him sensually; the camera dollies forward to a close-up of the two, excluding much of the glaring light in the background. As Inger turns her head right, towards the camera, there is an immediate cut to a medium shot of Andres, the camera panning with him as he walks to the wall in the background and moves the hands of the clock, which had been frozen at 12 o'clock. Finally, there is a cut back to Inger and Mikkel, who kisses her saying:

'Now life is beginning for us.' During these words, the clock is heard ticking steadily. The camera dollies further in to a close-up of the couple, as Inger echoes her husband's words: 'Yes, life, life, life.' As the shot begins very slowly to fade out, music fades up and continues long after the screen is darkened.

This shot-by-shot breakdown is not meant to provide all the specifics of the sequence's structure, such as the duration of each separate shot, minute description of the *mise-en-scène* and its relation to camera movement, detailed analysis of the pictorial composition of each frame, the continuation of a movement in one shot to the movement in another, etc. It indicates only the most important elements of the sequence's structure, those which most perceptibly contribute to the amalgamation of all the components and result in cinematic abstraction. Evidently, the components were carefully chosen by Dreyer and are consistently simplified, i.e., deprived of all decorative features which do not reveal the 'spiritual content of the work'. Therefore, every subtle movement of the camera, every gesture of the actors, every change of lighting, every distortion of angle or introduction of sound effect becomes significant, and assumes a deeper meaning. In general, the cinematic structure of *Ordet* is a brilliant example of a presentation of a transcendental idea by the simplest, most austere cinematic devices, which are constantly kept in balance with the 'director's conception of his material'.

There are many films which deal with the theme of death and the philosophical aspect of human existence, but few succeed in expressing the spiritual meaning of life and death in a manner that is not available to any other medium, and which can be perceived only through the process of the direct viewing of a film. Only this direct perceptual experience of Dreyer's *images* permits the audience fully to understand his concept of abstraction, which provides the 'fourth dimension' in cinema. On the level of film analysis, abstraction can be delineated and appreciated only by a close, detailed examination of the cinematic values in a film. The crucial difference between the literary-interpretative and cinematic-structural methodologies of analysing films raises a basic question about the legitimate approach to cinema as a medium in its own right, and not as an extension of other arts whose aesthetic modes are often imposed upon this medium.

The idea of resurrection is one of the most evasive and most difficult to be realised in terms of cinema. Yet it is often exploited in horror movies or conventional religious spectacles. Almost regularly, the screen presentation of a man's resurrection turns into a mechanical optical effect; all that these tricks amount to is the trivial illustration of a fable aimed at triggering the viewer's fascination with the supernatural. Dreyer both avoided these clichés and succeeded in describing 'inner life' of the human desire to possess a god-like power; man's irreconcilability with the state of death, or, conversely, his acceptance of death as the beginning of a new, spiritual life. This ideational 'message', or, to use Dreyer's term, 'spiritual mood', is generated

in *Ordet* by the work in its totality. The cinematic stylistics of Dreyer's method are best exemplified in the film's last sequence. The highly transcendental, philosophical meaning of the film is expressed in a highly cinematic manner, and therefore, one does not experience the same mood from merely reading Dreyer's adaptation of Munk's play. The basic ideological message is, of course, similar, but the experience of the 'spiritual mood' is essentially different. It is also dissimilar in its cinematic impact from Gustav Molander's film *Ordet* (1943), based on the same play and—though more faithful to the original—structured in a disparate cinematic manner.

The purification and simplification of Munk's dramatic text, which Dreyer radically condensed in his manuscript, was not only continued but fully elaborated in the studio by the means of cinema. This becomes evident when one compares the published script with the actual shot-by-shot breakdown of the film. The script contains only dialogue with a very few indications of the characters' psychology and a very general description of the action designed to help the actors understand the situation and the relations among the characters. Out of this literary/dramatic material, Dreyer created a cinematic vision whose hypnotic impact cannot be appreciated without actually projecting the film on to the screen. Only then does the viewer experience this spiritual/symbolic mood and meaning which Eisenstein in *Film Form* calls 'overtone conflicts foreseen but unwritten in the score [read: script] which cannot emerge without the dialectic process of the passage of the film through the projection apparatus, or that of the performance by a symphony orchestra.'

Here the two film geniuses conceptually meet: what Eisenstein describes as 'overtone vibrations', whose impact 'envelops the basic tone in the whole host of the secondary vibrations', is equivalent to Dreyer's 'rhythmic pulse', whose impact 'in its turn supports the mood of action at the same time that it influences the viewer's state of mind.' Dreyer, like Eisenstein, insisted that all the elements of a film's structure be integrated by the film-maker's style, which 'saturates and penetrates the finished work of art and yet is invisible and undemonstrable.' The invisible and undemonstrable impact of the stylistic *whole* is, in fact, the 'fourth dimension' characteristic of a genuinely cinematic work, a dimension which Eisenstein labelled 'overtone'. Amazingly, Dreyer almost precisely echoes Eisenstein's concept about overtone as 'an actual piece, an actual element of . . . a fourth dimension.' Eisenstein wrote his essay on 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension' in 1929, and a quarter of a century later (in 1955) Dreyer reconfirmed in a metaphorical sense that 'perhaps film will never become really three-dimensional, but with the help of abstraction it will, on the other hand, be possible to introduce both a fourth and a fifth dimension to cinema.'

It is of little significance whether Dreyer, as seems likely, arrived at this theoretical conclusion after reading Eisenstein; what is important is that he demonstrated this concept through his films, which convey spiritual content through cinematic overtone as a result of the principle of amal-



'Ordet': Inger and her husband, Mikkel. 'Now life is beginning for us . . .'

gamation and the concept of abstraction. Both Eisenstein and Dreyer claim that 'the fourth dimension' is an 'unwritten' and 'invisible' phenomenon. As an after effect of screening, overtone cannot be empirically verified; but one certainly can delineate under what circumstances overtone can occur and from what filmic structure it may result.

In *Ordet*, the genuine impact of overtone emerges from the dynamic counterpoint between all the partial rhythmic lines which lead to an overall rhythmic vibration and the metaphoric meaning of the film. After the finale, the sensitive spectator becomes aware that his strong impression and unique experience result from an amalgamation of all the film's components into cinematic abstraction which reveals and strengthens the spiritual content of Dreyer's masterpiece. ■

Quotations from Carl Dreyer are taken from four essays: 'Thoughts on My Craft' (first published in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, 1956; reprinted in *Film—A Montage of Theories*, edited by Richard Dyer MacCann, Dutton, New York, 1966) and 'A Little on Film Style', 'The Cinematization of *Ordet*' and 'Imagination and Colour' (all in Dreyer in *Double Reflection*, edited by Donald Skoller, Dutton, New York, 1973).

Still's taken from the frame by the Danish Film Museum, Copenhagen.

Just over ten years ago—on October 10th 1964, to be precise—something happened which was to have far-reaching consequences for the film-making business. 'First Time on Any Screen Anywhere! Tonight, World Première of a Feature Length Motion Picture—*See How They Run*.' So read the newspaper advertisements, and what they were advertising, of course, was the first movie specially made for television. It was an agreeable if unspectacular beginning: the film, directed by David Lowell Rich and starring Senta Berger, John Forsyth and Pamela Franklin, was a neat, unpretentious thriller about a group of children whose scientist father has been killed leaving (or so all of us and all of them suppose) the Formula somewhere in their unconscious keeping. The priority of *See How They Run* was quite accidental. It was one of a group of films made for television by Universal, the first of which was supposed to be Don Siegel's version of *The Killers*; but at the last minute that was deemed too brutal for home consumption and diverted to cinema screens.

Where, truth to tell, it seemed completely at home. So, no doubt, would *See How They Run*; at that time no one had given much thought to the question of whether a film made for television was or ought to be in any way different from a film made for the cinema. All producers knew was that the old cinema films that were then being sold in ever increasing numbers to American television were racking up some remarkable viewing figures, and that therefore maybe small-budget films could be channelled directly to television, where they would enjoy all the kudos of 'world premières' without first going through the interim period of probably undistinguished release to a dwindling cinema audience. In other words, the first definition of movies-for-television was deliberately framed to exclude the television element. These were films, made on film stock, not on tape, and shot exactly as cinema films in their budget range would be, because it was felt that this is what television audiences wanted: a sense of cinema occasion without having to go out to the cinema.

But of course a mental separation of things physically brought together cannot last for ever. It was evident that, whatever the popularity of cinema films on television, they did from time to time pose practical problems. There was the matter of variously wide screens, and how the image seen on the standard-shape television screen should be selected. And in comedies especially there was the matter of different paces required for the cinema, where one might hope for prolonged laughter at certain points, and for television, where even an appreciative audience broken up into ones and twos were hardly likely to be rolling on the hearthrug in abandoned merriment. While taking advantage of the good associations for television audiences of the movie-movie, there was no need to saddle oneself with the disadvantages if one was working directly for television. And so, little by little and almost unconsciously, a degree of theorising about what was more and less suitable for television, and how a movie-for-television might with advantage differ from a cinema movie, began to make itself felt.

Necessarily so, since during the next ten years television came to play a more and more prominent role in the film business, the setting-up and financing of films. Here some distinctions have to be made, or at any rate considered. There are a number of possibilities open to promoters of a marriage between cinema and television. The programme of film-making instituted by RAI

Movies for a Small Screen

John Russell Taylor



Katharine Hepburn in Anthony Harvey's *'The Glass Menagerie'*

Gloria Swanson in Curtis Harrington's *'Killer Bees'*



in Italy, for example, seems both in theory and in practice to have very little to do with television. They finance cinema films in return for having the first option on the film's showing and thereafter the normal returns from a normal cinema distribution—which, obviously, their legal set-up allows them to enter into, as the BBC's does not. Consequently the film-makers who have worked for them tend to regard the source of their film's finance and its statutory first showing on Italian television as almost coincidental. One would be hard put to it to find much evidence of special adaptation to television in the later films of Olmi (*I Recuperanti*, *Durante l'Estate*, *La Circonstanza*) or in Bertolucci's *Spider's Stratagem*; and while the essay form of *The Clowns* may have been suggested to Fellini by the television connection, it is one he proceeded to develop expressly for the cinema in *Roma*.

Much the same applies to such of the German films financed by television as we get to see—who, for instance, could guarantee to work out which Fassbinder films might have been first destined for television and which for the cinema without advance information?—and to such offshoots of French television as Welles' *The Immortal Story* or Rossellini's *The Rise of Louis XIV*. Bergman's ventures into television offer a less clearcut case. *The Rite*, although of course it has been successfully shown in cinemas, does give some indications that Bergman was deliberately trying for a 'televisual' style, emphasising the confined settings and playing much of it in close-up. That, at any rate, would seem to have been the intention. But the question does also come up, and comes up with even more force in *Scenes from a Marriage*, of whether this distinction is valid. *Scenes from a Marriage*, again, is played largely in close-up, and is constructed in long, sustained dialogue scenes. But I think it would be difficult to maintain that the style, while right for the subject on television, is wrong for it on the cinema screen—or for that matter that the subject itself dictates treatment in one medium rather than the other.

Which, when we come down to it, is the question. Though there may be styles of film-making which are more immediately at home on the large screen and others which seem more evidently at home on the small, is there any essential difference between the two? And have we given ourselves a fair chance to find out, or have we jumped in too soon with virtually unquestioned assumptions about the rights and wrongs of the case? Who says that a predominance of close-ups is not appropriate for the cinema and is the most appropriate thing for television? And would it be suggested that *Les Parents Terribles*, if it were made today, was obviously a televisual fish out of water? We already have our myths, and many film-makers apparently live by them, but are they true?

Hard to say, even after ten years of movies-for-television. In most of them there are too many accidentals mixed up with the essentials. Purely economic factors, for instance. We know pretty well how films are made for American TV when they have the budgets of old-time B-features, but we are only now being enabled to observe how they might be approached with a budget of



'Isn't It Shocking?': Ruth Gordon (right) as Crazy Marge

2½ million dollars (as with Tom Gries' four-hour *QB VII*, a best-seller which television won from the cinema). So before we start trying to find a coherent pattern in what has happened, and predicate from it about the way things ought to be or have to be, we had better go back to the beginning and consider how we do look at television and what will and won't and may and may not work.

To begin with, we see television, for the most part, in very small groups, mostly alone or with one or two other people. We see it in domestic circumstances, with telephones to ring, kettles to boil, the evening paper waiting to be read, visitors to drop in unexpectedly, or just other members of the household to be considered and accommodated. Much of what we see is broken up with greater or lesser frequency by commercials. The screen, even the largest domestic screen, is smaller in proportion to the room and the audience than in a cinema. Few people, apparently, now watch television in the dark. And of course you have not had to move from your own fireside and are not conscious of having paid good money to see any specific programme. All these elements must have some effect, either on one's powers of physical concentration or on one's attitude of mind.

The immediate effect usually suggested is

'The Cat Creature': Gale Sondergaard, Meredith Baxter in Curtis Harrington's film



that all this liability to distraction makes for a more diffused kind of attention, with a corresponding need for television to work in smaller areas, hooking one's attention back, as it were, every two or three minutes while not insisting on the necessity of our following the overall continuity of what comes in between. Clearly this is to an extent true, though it is easy in contrast to over-emphasise the magical hold the large glittering screen has on an audience's attention in the comforting womb-like darkness of the cinema. We all know how irritable and fidgety one can get sitting through a bad film in the cinema; and the fact that it takes more of an act of will to get up and walk out than it does to drift away from television does not necessarily mean that while one is sitting in the cinema one is actually paying more real attention to what is happening on the screen. Indeed, I would guess that more people sleep in the cinema than drop off in front of their television sets.

All the same, it is undeniably true that some kinds of entertainment that would be insufferable in the cinema are really quite acceptable on television. Very flat, meandering, unstructured documentaries, for instance, that merely give you half an hour of random impressions of life up the Amazon, or the mating season of the arctic goose. These are the cut-and-come-again, tune in when you feel like it sort of programme that seems to tell us something significant about television. In support one might adduce the improvement certain cinema films seem to undergo in their translation from large to small screen: while some good films undeniably look a lot less good on television, some bad films appear singularly enhanced.

From this one might theorise, and many have, that the slow, intense build-up, the really concentrated, concentration-demanding scene, is at a disadvantage on television. Television has bred, so the argument runs, a generation capable of following only a succession of detached thrills and gimmicks—hence the successful narrative incoherence of the James Bond films. When the viewers are finally dragged away from their sets, they will tolerate nothing but bonfires. Maybe. But there is also evidence to show that when television is given a proper run-in—when, for instance, it is not interrupted every ten minutes by commercials—it can induce concentration just as intense and sustained as the cinema. Especially if one is watching it alone. But not necessarily: I saw Anthony Harvey's film of *The Glass Menagerie* (which he says was started as a cinema film and only rechannelled halfway through) on its first screening in America, sponsored by IBM, who required only two inserted commercials at the 'natural' act breaks; and I can testify that it held about eight people with me enthralled, hardly a word exchanged, throughout its length. That is a classic of the slow build, where atmosphere is all and any isolated few moments would make little or no sense. It worked, in other words, very much as I would suppose *Scenes from a Marriage* worked on Swedish television—which is not, when you come down to it, the way television is supposed to work at all.

And not, certainly, the way most American movies for television have tried to work up to now. Naturally, the great problem of the

genre in America has been its prevailing taintness. Television drama as such has virtually died out in America, with a few rather pretentious exceptions like this season's taped version of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, with Faye Dunaway playing the pseudo-Marilyn character. Instead, filmed television rules in the dramatic sphere: one-off Movie of the Week-type films and series, now mostly an hour (minus commercials) each episode, sometimes an hour and a half. There might seem to be a world of difference between the two kinds, the 'movies' with their publicised world premières and the weekly grind of series. But in practice there is very little difference. Many of the movies are series pilots in disguise. You could, of course, make a straightforward sample episode, but then if it doesn't sell your money is down the drain. On the other hand, if you make a Movie of the Week or something similar, spending that little bit extra, hiring that much grander a supporting cast, at least you make your sale, whether or not the projected back-up series ever takes off. There have been occasions when a series has genuinely been a second thought, like *The Waltons*, arising from the enormous popularity of the original television film *The Homecoming*, starring Patricia Neal. But usually *Kojak* and *Toma* and *Hawkins* and *Get Christie Love!* know exactly where they are heading from the outset.

The series which result are often very much like series of cheap movies which played the cinemas in the Thirties and Forties. Some of those, like the Basil Rathbone Sherlock Holmes apocrypha, have come to television as late-night series, for all the world like an honoured ancestor of the present crop. And there is a very clear relationship between series of filmed episodes like *Ironside* or *Marcus Welby* and the endless successions of Charlie Chan or Falcon or Doctor Kildare films, which in retrospect seem merely to have missed their proper station in life. The resemblance has been intensified in recent years with the expansion of series episodes to ninety minutes apiece. My own favourite of these grander series was *Hawkins*, which last season in the States played every third week, rotating with two other series. It starred James Stewart as a crusty, crafty, vague yet sharp as a needle investigator disguised as a plain old country-boy lawyer. The role fitted him like a glove—obviously, it was designed for that very purpose—and episode after episode (each one, remember, a self-contained feature-length movie) it was fascinating just to watch the electrifying effect of a battery of big-star mannerisms deployed at full power in such a psychologically small compass.

The compass of most of the one-shot made for television films produced by the American studios has been psychologically small too. They are not necessarily small because they are for the small screen, but because they are exactly the equivalent of the B-features that used to be churned out for cinemas as long as it was worth anyone's while financially to do so. Technically there is really no difference, except perhaps in the scripting, where the inevitability (in America) of commercial breaks will often be given a nod by the concoction of mini-climaxes every few minutes. Even there, though,

nobody seems to be bothering much any more: the corny stop/start, back to meditations on the beach every five minutes structure of the Delbert Mann *David Copperfield*, shown in British cinemas to such odd effect in 1970, is already a thing of the past. If we feel that a cinema film like Lamont Johnson's *You'll Like My Mother* really belongs on television it is not because of anything distinctively televisual about it, or because the director has up to now distinguished himself mainly in television, but because we have now come to associate that type of film, films in that budget range, exclusively with television.

As with the old-time B-features, there are a lot of entirely routine, more or less competent television features being made (ABC, for instance, has come up with no fewer than two hundred in five years, while in the last year Universal made 29 television features and five 90-minute pilots as against nine theatrical features), often repeating the ideas of recent big hits or jumping on to some bandwagon. The disaster film, for instance, has already given rise to a quickie *Towering Inferno* and any number of films about jammed elevators, tottering cable-cars and runaway trains. And then, like the B-feature, the American television movie sometimes delivers pleasant surprises.

Generally at the less pretentious end of the scale. John Korty's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, a solemn and under-dramatised rehearsal of black American history during the last hundred years, won prizes and moved many Americans to proclaim that television had come of age, but for my money his earlier *The People*, a charming piece of science fiction about the descendants of men from outer space living anonymously in the American countryside, had much more going for it. Lamont Johnson has done better with little thrillers than with his solemnly silly homosexual drama *That Certain Summer*, which is the gay equivalent of the sort of black film in which Sidney Poitier had *Dignity*. Curtis Harrington has always mercifully avoided

the big subject, and has in *Killer Bees* (Gloria Swanson as queen) and *The Cat Creature*, a stunning re-creation of the Val Lewton era, made a couple of the most sheerly enjoyable films, for any size screen, of the last few years. John Badham's *Isn't It Shocking?*, with a mad-dog senior citizen running round killing all the survivors of the class of 1920 (though he has his work cut out with Ruth Gordon), was almost equally appealing, and there are more, like Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (shown in cinemas in Britain), or Peter Medak's glum little picture of a showgirl on the skids, *The Third Girl from the Left*.

I suppose that this kind of film-making will continue—the monster has to be fed—but already there are signs of a terrible urge towards intellectual respectability. The big subjects are getting thrashed out in films like *Miss Jane Pittman* and *That Certain Summer* and *QB VII* and Buzz Kulik's *Brian's Song* (a true story of a dying footballer tended by his buddy, music by Michel Legrand) and Lamont Johnson's *The Execution of Private Slovik*, the story the cinema several times found too hot to handle, which now looks merely too dull. *Folie de grandeur* has also taken the weird form of such remakes as *Brief Encounter*, now bloated with star power in the shape of Sophia Loren and Richard Burton as the housewife next door and that nice doctor down the road. Some very big cinema names are getting into the act—Otto Preminger and Stanley Kramer have made heavyweight trial dramas for television, and George Cukor's *Love Among the Ruins*, with Laurence Olivier and Katharine Hepburn, remains unseen at time of writing. Of course, the miracle may happen, the sudden transition from innocence to experience, from the aesthetic (if not technical) primitive to high art. But one fears the dread middle area of once cheery philistines trying embarrassedly to pull themselves up by their boot-straps into 'responsibility' and critical acceptance. Where commercialism has been bliss, 'tis folly to want class. ■

Sophia Loren on the railway platform in 'Brief Encounter'



THE COMMUNAL TOUCH

Paul Madden
and David Wilson

Most television viewers remember Colin Welland as the toothy, down-to-earth P.C. Graham of *Z-Cars*, the BBC series which began in the mid-Sixties and is still going strong. *Z-Cars*, with its then freshly minted documentary realism, tried to show life as it was in a contemporary Britain (and not how it might be, or never was) within the limits of a police series formula. It was the ideal finishing school for aspiring television writers, including such now established writers as John Hopkins, John McGrath and Alan Plater. Welland himself has at least four major television plays to his credit—*Bangelstein's Boys* (1969), *Roll on Four O'Clock* (1970), *Kisses at Fifty* (1973) and *Leeds United!* (1974).

It is too easy to pigeon-hole his plays as 'slices of life' in the naturalistic mainstream which is the dominant aesthetic of television drama, though this certainly explains part of their appeal to a popular audience as well as to critics. Welland is a superb recorder of life in his Northern background (he was born in Lancashire and has lived in Leeds), with its bawdiness and exuberance and viciousness. But he also has the Dickensian virtues—not only a delight in people's foibles and follies as expressed in individual speech and action, but also the ability to manipulate and heighten received reality (or

rather versions of reality) for dramatic purpose. To this end, Welland calculatedly integrates the licence of the dramatist with the freedom of television and its multiple techniques.

A girl in *Bangelstein's Boys* is described as a 'cross between Marghanita Laski and Arkle'; school Christmas parties in *Roll on Four O'Clock* are characterised as 'Nuremberg rallies with custard'. Welland's vivid use of vernacular emphasises, with its underlying healthy cynicism, an individual awareness of 'what the score really is', and contrasts it with the group-maintained

version of reality (what Erving Goffman has appropriately termed a 'team performance') within a community. The individual reacting against the community provides the most potent and consistent theme in Welland's work, although a crude model of polarisation—the conventional motif of the one against the many—is not enough to explain the sophistication of his treatment.

To most of its members the community is sacrosanct, and its codes of behaviour inviolate, whether it's a rugby club, a pub, a school, a church or a family. It's perfectly acceptable that *Bangelstein's Boys*, the lads of the rugby team, should have their occasional 'bit of spare' to supplement the sexual diet of their marriages. It's another ballgame when one of them flaunts his girl round the club as a permanent feature. The whole edifice, based on hypocrisy, is set to tumble, and so it does, on a rugby tour. Don, Bridget's young man in *Slattery's Mounted Foot*, misunderstands the nature of the Irish community to which she belongs, and not only has the gall to enter their annual race but actually wins it—to be disqualified, and Bridget loses her only chance to break away. In *Say Goodnight to Your Grandma* (1970), Jean sabotages her mother-in-law's idealised conception of 'the lads', who can do no wrong and who before his marriage counted Tony, her husband, among their merry number. At a party thrown to celebrate the validity of the myth, barely clad in Tony's old rugby jersey, she plays the game to its logical conclusion (a virtual striptease) and wins.

Colin Welland (centre) in 'Roll on Four O'Clock'



On one level Nana ('Sounds like something out of Peter Pan,' says Tony) has received her come-uppance ('Say goodnight to your Grandma,' Jean tells the baby); on another, Jean has substituted her own truer version of reality, which restores the 'lads' to their rightful roles as husbands and fathers.

It is impossible to discuss Welland's work without confronting the technical facility with which he presents his dramatic situations or foregrounds his themes. Welland has a penchant for short, sharp scenes, a deliberately elliptical snapshot style with sound overlays which spurs on the storyline, conflating time and place. Harry, in *Kisses at Fifty*, meets Audrey, a new barmaid at his local, on his fiftieth birthday, and recognises her rare spirit among the dead wood. A marvellous sequence precedes this. Harry steps out on his way to the pub and meets his granddaughter, who is skipping. As he walks she is counting in voice-over, literally counting off his years. 'Five-six-seven-eight . . . '—he passes his old school, and the soundtrack swells with singing ('We march to our places/With clean hands and faces. And pay great attention/To all we are told'). 'Fifteen-sixteen-seventeen . . . '—Harry passes the Territorial Army headquarters, an RSM's voice breaks in, and a band strikes up. 'Twenty-eight-twenty-nine-thirty . . . forty-six-forty-seven . . . ' The background has changed to a Northern industrial landscape, where Harry has wasted his life (he is a furnace-man). 'Forty-eight-forty-nine . . . '—he is at the pub door, he goes in. 'Fifty today, lads!'—the impact is tremendous, and it's no surprise that Harry's encounter with Audrey is electric.

Such a degree of stylisation and contrivance, with its free use of sound, particularly music, to complement the visuals, could have fallen flat; it doesn't because it is rooted in a recognisable reality. Music and songs are important to Welland's plays: 'The Moon Shines Bright on Charlie Chaplin' counterpoints the theme of *Kisses at Fifty* that the pathetic loser, Harry, can yet win out. The titles of *Bangelstein's Boys* and *Slattery's Mounted Foot*, like that of *The Wild West Show* (Welland's new series), all come from rugby or pub songs.

Leeds United!, Welland's most recent play, conceived on an epic scale compared with normal television drama, is based on the three-week unofficial strike of clothing workers in Leeds in 1970. It's in the tradition of the committed, realistic, political dramas, shot on location, which have trickled on to the TV screen at decent intervals. Given Welland's Socialism (emotional, he says, rather than theoretical) and his preoccupation with the versions of reality which dominate to the detriment of the individual, it is perhaps the play to which his others point the way. None deals directly with such an openly political situation, but embryonic, if oblique, political critiques can be seen in the earlier plays.

In *Roll on Four O'Clock* (directed by Roy Battersby, as is *Leeds United!*), Max, the art teacher, criticises not only the school, which is really a prison ('We virtually crucify a lad and we dust our hands—on to the next shipment—we're nothing but bloody warders'), but implicitly the society in which it is located; and the opening images of the play show the school set in a wasteland. The headmaster ('They've got to go to the wall,

I'm afraid,' is his comment on non-conforming individuals) conceives his role as preparing his charges for a 'hard world'. The solution, Welland implies, lies not with the individual as such, but with the awakening of the collective consciousness, as *Leeds United!* demonstrates with characteristic Welland vigour, capturing all the enthusiasm of a movement gathering momentum as the strike spreads from factory to factory.

P.M.

How did you start writing for television?

COLIN WELLAND: As far as my drama education is concerned, the only modern plays I had any contact with were the plays of Shaw, *Saint Joan* and so on. This was as far as my grammar school GCE drama took me. I hadn't really come across any contemporary playwrights until I became an actor, and the first play I acted in was *The Birthday Party*. It took me completely by surprise to find myself learning and actually speaking language which you hear spoken every day. And not only was it everyday language, it was also vibrant and exciting and just as aesthetically satisfying as Shaw or Shakespeare. I was fascinated just sitting in a café and hearing it all around me, just how inventive ordinary speech is. And immediately I started writing plays, right from that early brush with Pinter. That was about fourteen years ago.

The first play I wrote was called *The Room Orderly*, about National Service. It never saw the light of day, of course. And then a children's stage play, which also never saw the light of day. Then I went into *Z Cars*, and of course I couldn't resist having a go at *Z Cars*. So I wrote two *Z Cars* scripts, which were bought—and never saw the light of day. When I finished in *Z Cars*, I was out of work, so I wrote a half-hour television play called *Say Goodnight to Your Grandma*. I sent it off, and a script editor sent it back saying, 'Very good, Colin,' patronising an actor trying to have a go at writing, 'but your characters are so real they're inclined to be boring.' So I put that one away. Then Ken Loach said, 'Why don't you write something about what you really know about, something nobody else has ever written about?'

So I wrote *Bangelstein's Boys* as a stage play—Ken was going to direct it at the Grand Theatre, Leeds, except that when the backers read it they were so horrified by the language that they refused to put up the money. So Ken Loach took it along to the BBC's 'Play for Today', where it languished for two years. Then Kestrel Films was formed to produce films and television plays. London Weekend Television commissioned Kestrel to make twelve television plays, and the first one Kenith Trodd produced was *Bangelstein's Boys*. We made it as a film, a television film. It was well received, and from there I've just carried on, writing about events which to me matter to the ordinary person.

What amazes me about people is that they live in such small worlds, the walls which surround their lives are so very close to them, and what happens within that little compound is just as important or emotionally stimulating or anger-arousing as anything on a larger scale. For instance, in a pub I go to there's trouble at the moment because of a mess-up about a Christmas

domino handicap—putting new people on the highest handicap because they don't know them, whereas the regulars think they should be scratch because they don't know them—and that domino handicap is as important to them as something on a much larger scale is to people in as it were the outside world. A lot of my plays are about the energies that can be roused by people just living out their lives, communicating with the people around them, the effects certain events are going to have on them, what their neighbours will say and so on. It's that sort of chemistry on a small scale which can generate the emotional drive and power of a political play.

That's especially true of *Bangelstein's Boys* and *Slattery's Mounted Foot*.

It's true of those plays, and it's true of *Kisses at Fifty*, which is about the effect a man's leaving his wife has on his circle of friends, his pub and everything around him. And *Say Goodnight to Your Grandma* . . . it looks so innocent just taking your baby to see your mother-in-law, but what happens is horrifying. Then *Jack Point* was about the political intrigues of replacing an older actor with a younger actor.

Your plays are generally set in communities—families, pubs, clubs.

Because that's where people are forthcoming. That's where I get most of my information from—the community centres. Pubs and clubs and so on are such an integral part of the sort of people I like and work with and write about that they always seem to turn up in my plays.

But at the same time there is something artificial about a tightly knit community. This is a point made at the end of *Bangelstein's Boys*, when one of them suddenly sees how blinkered they are in the narrow world of the rugby club.

The community may be blinkered, but that doesn't make it less valid as a community. The lads in *Bangelstein's Boys*, viewed from the outside, may seem pathetic and hypocritical, and this is what one of them saw at the end—when it comes to the crunch they're not worth anything, the lads. But viewed from the inside they're all important—it's what 'the lads' will think, what the wives will think, and 'You're letting the lads down.' It's very easy for someone who lives a fairly sophisticated life in London and can see these things in perspective—in that sense I agree, these are artificial boundaries. But the communities are not artificial to the people in them.

Your plays often have a member of a particular community who disrupts it by breaking out, breaking the rules, refusing to conform.

That's certainly a recurring theme. The community can have a reactionary effect on someone who wants to get out. I had this myself: I always wanted to be an actor, but the thought of going to RADA was just beyond anyone in my school. In my school you became a teacher or . . . The best you did was go to Oxford and take a Geography degree. I get letters from people now saying, 'I want to write, I want to be an actor,' and there's nothing you can do for them. You've got to make the break yourself. I was twenty-eight, teaching, playing for the rugby team, and I had to say to myself,

'I'm going to write to every rep in the country—I want to act, so I've got to get out.' But I don't feel estranged from my background; all my formative years were there.

But if you write from roots, isn't there a danger that you will find it difficult to write from more recent experience? *The Hallelujah Handshake* seemed a move away from roots and into new areas, as did *Roomful of Holes*.

Roomful of Holes was an anthology play, written to order, and that makes a big difference. I don't like it now. On the other hand, I was at a meeting in Manchester about the fourth TV channel, and a trade unionist stood up and said, 'I see Colin Welland is in the audience. What we need is more plays like *Roomful of Holes*, which did more for me in fifty minutes than twenty-five years of education.' You don't know which play is getting through and which isn't. But I've never felt any need to write about the middle-class. *Hallelujah Handshake* was as near as I came to it, and that was a story told me by a friend who is a Methodist minister.

Leeds United! is your only directly political play.

Of course, that play had a lot more humanity in it than in what you finally saw on television. Because of the cost. A lot of the scenes which provided the flesh and blood of the characters had to go, because we had to cut and cut until we just had the story and the energy; it would have lasted five days if we hadn't cut it down to a bare outline. Then of course the critics say that it lacked flesh and blood... A strike which lasted three weeks and involved thousands of people—it should have been a big feature film, but it would never be made as a feature film in this country, so you have to try to fit it into the half-pint pots that are available.

It was immensely difficult to set up. It took two years to get a final script, then another year to get mounted. There were problems about cost, and then we had to play Machiavellian games in Leeds to get permission to film in all the locations. It was tremendously difficult to do. And the greatest reward it got was the vicious reaction from the right wing, which at least proved that it got home. And then I was delighted to find that all the companies in Doncaster and Darlington and so on found themselves with strikes on their hands, as the people realised that they were working in the same conditions as the women they had seen in the play. It's still having repercussions—people standing up in trade union meetings and saying, 'You're just like the bastards in *Leeds United!*' It was this rawness which scared the pants off everybody. If nothing else we got that in the play, the vicious anger, tooth and claw, of these women—which caused all the fuss about the play in Leeds because they couldn't remember themselves as being like that.

Your first television play was originally written for the stage. How closely did you work with the director when it was being adapted for television?

I had done three years on *Z Cars* as an actor. That was live, so I did know the whole vocabulary of television. Luckily the play was written in a very television style—songs, and lots of short scenes, and so on.

I had seen *Oh, What a Lovely War* and that had affected me tremendously. So it did convert very easily, it wasn't a straightforward proscenium play. But what did happen was something that has happened with every play, which is that the producer and director have been involved from the very concept. When I was researching *Leeds United!* in Leeds, the producer, Kenith Trodd, and the director, Roy Battersby, were up there working with me. We think of the director as part of the thing right from the beginning.

So you take an idea rather than a script to a producer.

Always. And to the producer who seems right for a particular idea. One producer is right for a studio-based, small cast play, another for something larger and more spread out, like *Roll on Four O'Clock*.

Do you think about the visuals when you write?

All the time. For instance, this is an extract from one of the plays I'm writing now about a northern rugby club. The scene is the disco in the rugby club:

The club's swinging. It's for the Colts really, the young players and their girl-friends. The older wives don't come. Some of the older players like to sneak out and stand at the bar behind knowledgeable pints and wisecracks, and remember. The bar has been cleared of the centre tables, and they are just around the room. In the corner is a mobile disc assembly with a jaundiced disc jockey blathering out banalities. ESTABLISH Terry and Ken at the bar, the unmarrieds, and Chas and Harry behind it. Gerry is dancing. PAN past him, past the lads, past Billy standing with a cider, watching. Past Ron at the table in the entrance taking money, and into the corridor, where Ned and Tony are serving refreshments behind the food bar, in their shirt sleeves, looking harassed, dishing out crisps and hot dogs which they are frying on stoves behind them.

That's almost directed already, in the writing.

Yes, but a director need not follow the technical directions, like the pan. What I'm trying to do is to establish the club, establish everyone who is there, and then discover, past everyone else, the lads who are doing the frying and who we don't expect to be there, and certainly not frying sausages. Because the dialogue starts with Tony saying, 'Christ almighty, I wangled my way out of the bloody house for this. Could have had my feet up at home with *Kojak*, *Match of the Day*, and here I am feeding the bloody five thousand.'

The 'stage directions' in your scripts are very detailed, almost in the style of a novel.

People have asked me why I don't write a novel in the style of my stage directions. When you think of all the people who read a script like this—designer, wardrobe lady, make-up girls, assistant director, director, floor manager—if you do give them this sort of information, then they know what the play is all about, not just the story but the genre, what makes the people tick. So you won't get a designer designing a pub that these fellows could never be in. This is the opening of *Mad Mick*, another play in this series:

EXTERIOR STREET, DAY. *The camera picks up Linda walking on the street, a Cleckheaton*

street, briskly pushing a folding push-chair. In it is little Richard, two years old, wrapped up against the March wind. It bites into Linda's face as well, and she screws her eyes against it, bares her teeth in an unconscious grin. Linda is twenty-six and hardened, yet with a pinched beauty, a matter-of-factness about her, in every movement of the head, the glance of the eye, in the way she walks. She takes it as it comes, every situation regardless, but has a tremendous underlying strength. The street is crowded with Friday shoppers, women, mostly women with kids. STAY CLOSE with Linda in CLOSE-UP. Be aware of colour flashing past behind her. PULL BACK in focus, see the hoardings pasted on the window behind her. They pass slowly, legibly, perhaps in slow-motion, but interminably, ponderous, thundering, unrelenting: '23p Fairy liquid, 30p digestive biscuits, 18½ Stork margarine, 9½ orange squash.' As they pass behind Linda's profile, like battle banners, fluorescent, vulgar, bludgeoning, the sound of the checker's till rises in unison with the prices, punching 'Brrr, brrr, brrr—5p Ski, 5p Heinz Baby Food, 12½ Jaffa cakes.' Then Linda front face, the checker's till rising in her ears, 'Brrr—da, brrr—da, brrr—da,' faster, faster, faster, close on her face. Then...

Then you cut to her husband, who is a drayman, loading barrels at a tremendous pace, to make the money. Then you go back to Linda going round the shelves. So it's all visual, right from the start.

Unlike Jim Allen's scripts, for instance, which are much less detailed.

But Jim Allen works with Ken Loach, and Loach doesn't want to know about that kind of detail. He barely has a written script. Unlike Roy Battersby, who loves to know what's wanted of him and then embroiders on that, reconceives that. But you've got to take this trouble, I think. For instance, in *Mad Mick* Linda meets two of her girlfriends after the shopping and they go for a coffee. Now you could just put 'Coffee bar in Leeds', and what would you get? A couple of production assistants would go up to Leeds, they wouldn't know where these girls go for a coffee, and they'd end up in Fuller's tea shop... It's not just a matter of authenticity, it's the colour and texture you get from going to this sort of trouble. And I like to get this in the writing.

For instance, Mike Apted is a director who can create a communal vigour in a studio. He creates a pub that's actually living in the studio, not with stone-faced extras getting up and walking out on signals. But when he got the SFTA award for direction for *Kisses at Fifty*, the clip they showed was exactly as I had described it in the script. Other parts of the play were all him, but this was verbatim from the script, and mostly visual. Yet in the minds of the award people it was direction. Of course, this can work the other way, a writer applauded for a bad script which is well directed. But on the whole it's rubbish to give awards to individuals these days—it's a communal thing.

Do you like to be involved at every stage in the making of a play?

I like to be involved, though it's not always economically possible. I'm always involved in the casting, and in scenes where I know things about the setting that the unit won't know. I went up for one of the



'Bangelstein's Boys'

rugby plays, and they had a referee who didn't know the rules. You're answerable for any idiocies that happen in your own script.

Many of your plays are built up out of very short scenes, and there is always a lot of movement.

I've just acted in an Alun Owen play, and he writes very long scenes. Whereas I find that after about three minutes into a scene my mind is leaping ahead, wanting to get on to something else. It's just the way you conceive a play. I used to paint like this, too. Some people could build a painting up very slowly, but I'd be getting the whole thing moving, comment on it up there, bring out something there, re-echo a tone down here. One of the critics said of *Bangelstein's Boys* that it had 'an almost obsessive desire not to bore.' You must keep it going, particularly in television. You've got to catch them; they haven't paid to see it, so you've got to make it so exciting that they are going to stay and watch. If you start with a long scene you're asking for trouble. We did have a long opening scene in *Leeds United!*, but people watching that would already be committed. Allan Clarke, the Leeds United footballer, who helped a bit on the play, told me that he was only going to watch for ten minutes and then sat all the way through it. Because once we'd got everything established we were nipping on, overlaying, getting into different parts.

Do you prefer writing for film rather than for videotape?

I would like everything filmed. The rugby plays are on LMC, mobile video, which is very difficult because there are only two hand-held cameras. So there is enormous trouble with big scenes, because you've got to do it over and over again shooting

from different angles, like a film. But you only have five days for a fifty-minute production. It's falling between two stools, since you don't have the advantage of the studio, with four cameras, and you don't have the advantage of being able to shoot it like a film because you don't have the time.

The dialogue is all in the script?

I love form in a play, how a play can gather pace. I can't understand how a director can create a play without a script, without dialogue. There's a beauty in dialogue, there's a beauty in contrived speech which isn't worth sacrificing for realism which is phoney anyway. Why should you think that an actor can invent better dialogue than a writer? If you really had an actor on a ledge 3,000 feet over an Alpine gorge and pulled his rope away and then said 'Now, behave,' you might have something. But they're saying, *pretend* you're on an Alpine ledge and think about what you would say. Well, I say the writer can pretend better than the actor.

Is writing for television constricting?

It's becoming more so because of the cost.

So you would prefer to write films?

Some of the plays should have been films, but it's just not on in this country. The money boys are just not interested in making films about British people. If I were an American I'd probably have had a lot of films made, but I can't get them off the ground here. I've twice been offered half the budget by the National Film Finance Corporation, but we couldn't get the other half. They really are monsters, the people in charge of the film industry. I feel as though I'm getting into a cage with some exotic animal when I go into their offices.

Do you get offers to write for the cinema?

I get paperbacks sent to me all the time. But I just don't want to know. I've always enjoyed what I write, and I don't want to start not enjoying what I write. A lot of writers who never write for television or the stage are making money out of writing film scripts which are never made, and the production companies know they will never be made. So I don't particularly want to write for films. But I do want to write for the stage again. It's a much harder discipline, but you can do things on the stage that you would never get away with on television.

Which of your television plays are you happiest with?

I used to think *Roll on Four O'Clock* was the best I've done, but the one I got most kick out of was *Leeds United!*. It had its flaws, but it was something that no other television service in the world would have made. It was a real achievement to get that play on at all.

The one thing I'd say about writing for television is that I think realism has had its day. Something else has got to happen now, something more imaginative. I think *Leeds United!* was the ultimate in realism. Nobody is going to get away again with fifteen extras pretending to be five hundred. *Leeds United!* signalled the end of documentary realism. It was a great watershed for me. I don't think I want to write realistically again. Not that what I've written has ever been really realistic, not flat Loach-type realism. But I'd like to put a bit of the theatre magic into television. Not kid yourself that it's really happening, but saying, 'It's not happening, but by God we can make you believe that it is—or can we, because it isn't really.'

Film REVIEWS

A Bigger Splash

David Hockney has played a leading, or emblematic, role in the transformation of British life over the past fourteen years. His rise as an exhibitionistic, openly homosexual, unabashedly North Country working-class artist represents a variety of apparent liberations: from a metropolitan cultural establishment, from conventional sexual attitudes, from middle-class standards and mandarin tastes, and so on. This performance has been carefully reflected by the media, for which he became a key figure in the 1960s phenomenon known as 'Swinging London'. He was one of four young Royal College of Art painters who were chosen to appear in the 1962 *Monitor* television programme *Pop Goes the Easel* (directed by Ken Russell), which overnight made Pop Art a nationally recognised fashion; in Clive Donner's 1964 film *Nothing But the Best*, the ruthless business tycoon (Alan Bates), on the make and with an eye well-trained for balancing the trendy with the traditional, had a Hockney on his office wall; in Peter Whitehead's documentary *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* (1967), Hockney was interviewed as one of the prime movers of the current revolution in styles; in Tony Richardson's *Laughter in the Dark* (1969), one of the last hoarse gasps of the Swinging London cinema, Hockney turns up to put the seal on a smart party.

This status as artistic and social luminary is obviously what makes a full-length movie about Hockney interesting and commercially viable. It is, however, the background to Jack Hazan's *A Bigger Splash* (Lagoon) and not what it is about. In 1966 Hazan made *Especially at My Time of Life*, a modest little film contrasting the work and life-styles of a group of artists painting and sculpting in adjoining London studios. It was a diffident, unebullient picture, despite the current 'Swinging London' ethos, that carefully stalked its subjects and took its tone from them.

Though roughly categorisable as a documentary, *A Bigger Splash* was apparently a case of Hazan directing the principals to act out their lives, rather than a *cinéma vérité* exercise by which a director follows his subjects around filming their every action and gesture. The result is often stiff and rather stylised in character, and resembles Hockney's paintings in its combination of apparent naïve simplicity of surface and elaborate formality of organisation. At one point in the film, Hockney recalls his father some thirty years ago setting out to sell a billiard table the family no longer needed. He put an advertisement in the paper giving the number of the local telephone kiosk. When David returned home from school, there was his Dad sitting beside the kiosk in an armchair he'd trundled down the street. The description and its bizarre, matter of fact 'posed-unposed' character sounds like a rather typical Hockney portrait.

Hazan's film, made over a period of three years, begins in June 1973 in a Geneva hotel where Hockney is engaged in a sort of verbal mating dance with a new lover. It then moves back to May 1971, the point at which his long affair with the Californian Peter Schlesinger came to an end. The picture traces the effects

of this breach upon Hockney, Schlesinger and their immediate circle of friends, and also upon Hockney's work. As old friend and assistant Mo McDermott remarks, 'when love goes wrong more than two people suffer'; which is in a sense the leitmotiv of the picture. *A Bigger Splash* finally makes its way back to Geneva in 1973 and an announcement by Hockney that he's going to get rid of all the pictures he's done of Peter.

Hazan has decided with great boldness to centre the whole film upon Hockney's art. Thus Peter Schlesinger is not only a present and passing lover but a representative of the Californian homosexual subculture which Hockney had started to paint from seeing pictures in physique magazines before ever going there. (Despite the immediacy of his work, Hockney often draws upon existing images from other painters, from the photographs of Muybridge and so forth.) So when he dreams of Peter enjoying himself away from him, the image Hockney conjures up (or that Hazan presents) is of naked boys gaily romping in a swimming pool in a Los Angeles garden, a scene so often painted by him in the mid-Sixties, and the series to which the picture 'A Bigger Splash' itself belongs. Later, when he has a more anxious dream of Peter being cut off from society, we see Peter alone trying vainly to enter the house depicted in the painting 'Beverly Hills Housewife'.

All the characters in fact define their relationships with Hockney through the way he has painted them. His fellow artist Patrick Proctor is shown in his flat beside his portrait, which Hockney seems to be threatening to burn. The New York collector and connoisseur Henry

Geldzahler persuades Hockney to come to New York to work (and to 'compete' with Milton Avery and Edward Hopper as an observer of Manhattan); he then creates in his flat a menacing *tableau vivant* of Hockney's double portrait 'Henry Geldzahler and Christopher Scott'. No reason is given, but it seems a way of rejecting the artist, making him feel an outsider. It is one of the picture's many puzzles (and some might think it a weakness) that we cannot be sure just who is presenting this scene—Geldzahler, Hockney or Jack Hazan himself.

When Hockney disappears from New York, the news is brought to his friends, the designers Celia Birtwell and her husband Ossie Clark, and the latter drives off to the Tate Gallery to stand before Hockney's double portrait of Clark and Celia as a way of communing with his troubled friend. When he conducts a business discussion with his dealer John Kasmin, it is against the background of a portrait of Kasmin; into this scene is cut the image of Kasmin pushing his face against a pane of glass, a photograph which was the basis for the original painting. To Hockney the image against the glass is a painterly problem, to most observers it would appear to be a metaphor for rejection or exclusion.

At the centre of the film is Hockney's struggle over a painting of a figure standing beside a swimming pool in the South of France. This has been embarked upon as a major project to follow a half-finished portrait of Peter Schlesinger that Hockney destroyed after failing to complete it following the break-up of his romance. The new picture and the technical problems it presents come to preoccupy Hockney, and he uses the long-suffering Mo to stand in for the standing figure in the preparatory photographs. The figure is left blank in the painting until a chance meeting at a party between Hockney and Peter, who agrees to pose for some photographs that can be used to complete the painting.

In effect all these people live according to images they have created for themselves, and see the images created of them by Hockney as tokens or talismans. The narcissistic world of Swinging London lingers on. A key feature of many Hockney paintings is the way they are framed by curtains or borders; they are in fact pictures of pictures. Hazan has seized upon

'A Bigger Splash': David Hockney, Peter Schlesinger



this aspect of Hockney's work, putting it together with the artist's ability to make the technical problems of art do service for the emotional problems of life. In doing so he has made a film which successfully merges its own form and style with those of its subject.

PHILIP FRENCH

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia

Clouded by the ambivalence Sam Peckinpah has always felt for his own country, Mexico has figured through most of his films as a battlefield both real and metaphorical. As the South-Western extension of the Promised Land, it inspires the romantic's yearning for an ever-receding freedom; in its beguiling similarity and hostile polarity as a neighbour, it offers a testing ground for the ties of comradeship and country; and as a convenient bolthole, it holds out the security of being forgotten by the world one knew—which is both a blessing and a curse. A distilled exchange in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* summarises Billy's debate on the advantages of heading South, abandoning the vipers' nest of New Mexico and his own legendary status only to become, perhaps, 'just another gringo'. Billy: 'Mexico might not be bad for a couple of months.' Alias: 'It depends on who you are.' The exchange is later repeated with the speakers reversed, suggesting, like most of the action, a litany rather than a debate.

The curse of anonymity, of being 'just another gringo' and consequently a 'loser', has clearly befallen Bennie (Warren Oates) at the outset of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (United Artists). With just a hint of tongue-in-cheek autobiography (Bennie is first discovered as a performer, playing popular tunes for tourists in a run-down bar), Peckinpah seems to have abandoned his homeland with little regret and only one or two slighting references. But instead of the new life promised by the end of *The Getaway*, Bennie seems to have found the purgatory foretold in *Pat Garrett*. 'I never been any place I want to go back to . . . I want to go some place new,' and 'I could have died in Mexico City or T.J. and never known what the hell it was all about' are the grievances that drive him in pursuit of Garcia's much-prized head, a 'golden fleece' to this hungry expatriate, and his ticket to better times and new places.

Here, in fact, Peckinpah works the other side of his ambivalence about America, to savagely successful effect: the dislocations of exile evidently hold as many terrors as the tyranny of his native country. Significantly, as only his second feature to be made away from American soil, *Alfredo Garcia* is close in theme and imagery to *Straw Dogs*. Both, in a sense, internalise the Westerner's battle for the wide open spaces and the freedom that once were his; the struggle for identity becomes a more devious and desperate affair—an attempt to find roots and a rationale for existence in other places. And both reveal a rich and appropriate Gothic vein, as Peckinpah lends characteristic blood and fire to these symbolic contests.

If Bennie from the beginning is cursed as an outsider and a loser, similar fates seem to await all the characters of *Alfredo Garcia*, with dark tides of family pride and religious wrath flowing from the very first sequence. A pregnant girl, sunning herself by a river, is summoned into her father's presence. In a hall where rows of ancestors glower from the wall, El Jefe (Emilio Fernandez), patriarch of the *hacienda*, and an anomalous flock of dutiful clerics, black-robed women, conventional businessmen and gunslinger bodyguards, demands to know who fathered the child. When his daughter is at last forced to utter Garcia's name—only with the snapping of bone—El Jefe registers a betrayal ('He was like a son to me') before dispatching his legions with the offer of a million dollars to



'Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia': Warren Oates

the man who brings in Garcia's head. Two big-time American gangsters (Robert Webber and Gig Young) arrive in Mexico City to execute the contract, and while scouting his old haunts for news of Garcia, they encounter Bennie, down on his luck and ready to be tempted by the \$10,000 they later offer for the head.

A single detail serves, retrospectively, to colour the whole meaning of this first encounter, turning the film in upon itself and conjuring up the Gothic romance of a world where betrayer and avenger might meet, merge and embrace a common fate. As one of the gangsters produces a photograph of Garcia to show Bennie, the sound of a car crash is heard in the background; later, after Bennie himself has registered a pang of betrayal on learning that his mistress Elita (Isela Vega) has spent some time with Garcia, he hears that the latter has already died—in a motor accident. Bennie's pursuit of the man who, he admits, was dead 'the first time I met him' ends with death rounding out the picture—Bennie refusing to part with the head and dying at the wheel of a car—just as it was begun.

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia is rife with betrayal; but it is the self-betrayal of its *déraciné* and desperate hero, sacrificing such ties as he has to life for the future promise of gold on Garcia's head, that precipitates much of the bloodshed. As a destroyer of relationships, including his own (until he discovers, too late, his kinship with Garcia), Bennie is pursued by a nemesis of obscurely religious force. Scorning Elita's fears about disturbing Garcia's grave and desecrating his remains—'There's nothing sacred about holy ground, or a man that's in it, or you, or me'—Bennie is likewise casual about consecrating his affair with Elita. When she asks, on their last night together, to go to church, he equivocates; and the film cuts to darkened countryside and the car which has been pursuing them all the way, carrying the two Mexicans assigned to keep an eye on Bennie, who function throughout as a 'couple' in a kind of parody of their quarry, and who will kill Elita and consign Bennie himself to premature burial in Garcia's grave.

The scene in the cemetery brings the Gothic element magnificently to the fore. Clawing his way from the grave which seems to have at last fulfilled his fear of being mired in life, Bennie finally becomes both cursed and curser. Setting out to reclaim the head and to reap the full million dollars, instead of just the money he was offered, Bennie's subsequent journey is a

working back—almost as if he had passed through one of the mirrors he bleakly confronts from time to time—to the very source of the evil that has entrapped him. He catches up with and kills the two Mexicans, stranded by a punctured tyre as he and Elita had been; he witnesses the slaughter of Garcia's family, who intervene in order to recover their relative's missing portion and whose destruction anticipates the final purging of perverted ties of blood; and he guns down the two American gangsters, who are revealed at the end to be just one more fallible human partnership and not the smoothly functioning machine they had seemed.

Arriving at El Jefe's *hacienda* to discharge the debt of blood, Bennie briefly establishes the most 'pure' and the most impossible of the ties that have eluded him. Dressed in the now much-decayed white suit he has worn constantly, and appearing just as Garcia's son is being baptised (the anointing inevitably recalls the way he has kept Garcia's head packed in ice), he refuses to hand over the head in exchange for the money. Responding to the curt command of El Jefe's daughter, who has stood by, a detached onlooker also dressed in white, at the baptism of her child, Bennie guns down the patriarch. He and the girl snatch up their respective bundles, their 'marriage' somehow already consummated and over, and then part. All that is left is for Bennie to charge out to meet the fate that Peckinpah has plotted with the same inevitability, the same doomed peculiarity, as in his recounting of the historical saga of Garrett and Billy.

RICHARD COMBS

The Fate of Lee Khan

In 1366 China was two years away from overthrowing the Mongol invaders who had been occupying the country for more than a century; the most important of the Chinese resistance movements hastening that day was the one led by Chu Yuan-Chung, who went on to found the Ming Dynasty. *The Fate of Lee Khan* (Cathay) uses a fictional incident in Chu's campaign as a microcosm for the entire social and political situation: it describes the efforts of a resistance group to assassinate the Mongol baron Lee Khan and thereby recover a map of Chinese battle-plans that has fallen into his hands. Director-writer King Hu (more properly



'The Fate of Lee Khan'

Hu Chin-Chuan, but the Anglicised version of his name seems to be used everywhere outside Asia) adopts the deceptively simple strategy of identifying action with ideology, personal manoeuvres with political tactics; and if he has had the wit to cast his historical analysis in the form of a comedy-thriller, then it's fitting that it should often be difficult to say just where its levity ends and the revolutionary fable takes over. In its aesthetically devious way, his film is always strikingly beautiful.

Lee Khan (Tien Feng) travels into Shensi province to receive the map from a traitor in Chu's camp. Wendy (the superlative Li Li-Hua, a star of long standing in the Hong Kong cinema), proprietress of an inn and a revolutionary, learns that he intends to lodge with her; she gathers four younger female colleagues round her for support, and settles down to spotting the undercover agents, both friendly and hostile, mingling with her customers. The Chinese have barely closed their ranks when their prey arrives to take up residence. Powerful and highly intelligent, he takes delight in playing cat-and-mouse with them while he accomplishes his mission; he then rounds on them with an attack, inflicting several casualties, until the survivors—working as a team—manage to overcome him.

A bald narrative outline risks suggesting that *Lee Khan* would sit more comfortably within the Chinese martial arts genre than in fact it does. Its vividly stylised clashes, armed and unarmed, between Chinese and Mongol necessarily draw some of their effects from the repertoire of the genre (which Hu's work for Shaw Brothers in the 1960s anyway helped to define), but they're as far from being the film's *raison d'être* as they are from being mere set-pieces. More seriously, abstracting a synopsis from the plotting tends to camouflage the deliberately oblique way that Hu presents and develops his themes. He introduces eight of his eleven leading characters in the opening few minutes, and crowds the screen with subsidiary characters; he then proceeds to swirl them together in cross-currents of friendship, loyalty, mistrust and deceit that spell out the opposing factions' aims and ploys.

Each vignette is at once minutely detailed and part of a larger chain, in keeping with its status as the token of a political attitude. With most of the action confined to Wendy's inn (constructed in a huge cave, like a nest for the spirit it contains), Hu moves from one centre of interest to the next in long, elegant tracking shots, whose pace and dexterity fully equal vintage Paramount comedy. The prevailing

sense of confusion is to some extent countered by the fluidity of these movements, finding ordered paths through the chaos. It becomes apparent that the balance is a calculated effect, when it's seen to have 'cleared the ground' for the Chinese to rally and present a united front (posing as the inn staff) to their enemy; a similar motive informs the costume design, which gradually draws the Chinese operatives together through matching colours. Apart from some over-emphatic business with the coins used as recognition passes by the Chinese, these processes are conceived and executed with remarkable subtlety.

But then subtlety is the keynote, from the gleeful play with secret identities and patterns of deception in the first, broadly comic part of the film to the agonisingly tense stalemate of the second, where both sides have spies in the opposite camp but neither is sure how much the other knows. The game in one form or another is a constant motif (dice at the inn's gambling table; Chinese chess); the tone darkens as the metaphor swells into the reality of a situation with life-and-death stakes. Every directly comic incident either conceals a serious motive or foreshadows some future, harsher development.

Posing as a waitress, Angela Mao's Peony cannot resist her old habits and gives way to the impulse to steal a pearl from one of the customers; Wendy tells her to replace it and she does, in a delightful piece of knockabout mime. Later, in a manoeuvre twice as complex, she infiltrates Lee Khan's guarded room to steal the all-important map; but she comes away with the wrong document, and faces the job of returning it unnoticed. Another girl takes on the challenge, and dies in the attempt. Chinese patriot Sha appears at the inn in the guise of a beggar, and goes through the routine of insulting the management in song to establish his 'authenticity'; later, he has to sing a classic 'Farewell Song' so movingly that it will provide adequate cover for a desperate manoeuvre behind his audience's back. First the inn itself becomes a game arena, divided up by Lee Khan's guards with strict lines of demarcation; and then 'play' moves out into the surrounding countryside, where the cliffs and sand-flats provide a suitably austere setting for a conflict with the shields down at last.

At the climax, the Chinese initiatives resolve into a display of tactical teamwork that gets results, albeit at great cost. Hu 'scores' their offensive visually as a series of acrobatic leaps and somersaults, keeping real violence to the minimum of the final blow which downs Lee

Khan. The approach, emphasising the team over individual fighters of either sex, is the final strand in Hu's mesh of incidents, characters and visual and stylistic motifs, and it consolidates the film's model of the larger, historical drama. It's a remarkable achievement, and not just by the standards of Hong Kong cinema. One can only hope that its appearance here (mercifully subtitled, not dubbed) may herald more of King Hu's work.

TONY RAYNS

The Gambler

Leslie Fiedler once scandalised his fellow professors of literature by demonstrating how American literature is pathologically obsessed with death. It was not so much a matter of literal death as of an obsessive quest for something beyond the self which in its turn destroys the self: the Faustian bargain which finds its classic American literary expression in *Moby Dick*. Karel Reisz's new film *The Gambler* (CIC) would not merit such portentous comparison did it not invite it. On one, mostly narrative level about the misadventures of a gambler, it is also (intermittently) no more a film about gambling than *Moby Dick* is a story about the hunting of a whale. The clues are there for the taking, and they are not glossed over.

Exhibit one is another literary analogy. Axel Freed (and there's a name to conjure with) is a professor of literature in New York. Near the beginning we see him, after a bad night at the gambling tables, lecturing a class on Dostoevsky (who else?) and the conflict of reason and will. The question, he says quoting from *Notes from the Underground*, is not whether two and two make five but whether you can believe that they do. Therein, he suggests, lies the something different of athletes and poets; and also, we may note in passing, the interest in a character like Axel Freed (the script is an original by James Toback, who also teaches literature in New York) for a director whose previous films have dealt in characters like Morgan and Isadora Duncan and the hatchet hero of *Night Must Fall*, all of whom existed on the brink between reason and madness. Axel Freed is dominated by the compulsive urge to go one better than reason, and the odds, will allow. As he explains to Hips (Paul Sorvino), his contact with the underworld and a man not fool enough to gamble himself, if all his bets were safe 'there just wouldn't be any juice'. Axel is the kind of gambler who borrows a small fortune to pay off his gambling debts and then loses the lot on a single bet, a loser obsessed with the long odds prospect of a winning streak.

A Lawrentian observation offers another clue to Axel's obsession. Lawrence, Axel tells his enthusiastic class à propos of nothing in particular, said that Americans are afraid of new experience. For Axel the gamble, or rather the threat of losing (he keeps saying), is that new experience. But the book he is teaching when he invokes Lawrence is *In the American Grain*, and thereby hangs a significance. Reisz makes a lot of a scene—the generations gathered *al fresco* to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Axel's wealthy grandfather—which does nothing to advance the narrative but is obviously to be read in italics. In a speech to the admiring relations Axel celebrates his grandfather, Godfather of a voluminous family, as a Cossack-killing Lithuanian who came to God's own country and made it big the hard way.

Grandfather (Morris Carnovsky) is the archetypal American (and Jewish) businessman, gambling on success; later, he refuses to bail out his grandson because Axel, as a born loser, is a bad risk. Axel admires, and has inherited, this individualist impulse: tapping his mother for a loan to pay off his urgent debts, he plays tennis with her and plays to win. It is no surprise, particularly since the point is made

several times too often, that he treats his occasional girl (Lauren Hutton) as a sponge to soak up his depressions or a decorative travelling companion during an impulsive trip to the Las Vegas casinos. But then women have always been a problem for the American literary hero.

Heavily underscoring these clues to the psychology of a character, the film hedges its own bets by playing on the pathology of a gambler. The result, as the gambler himself might put it, is no juice. If Axel is to be interesting as a character, we need to know more about him than is offered by the script's literary nudges and a few black-edged snapshots from the family album (part of the interest in the not too dissimilar obsessive of *The Conversation* was precisely his apparent lack of background). As it is, we discover both too much and too little about Axel—which may explain why James Caan appears throughout to be not quite inside the character.

Given his will to lose, which is established from the outset, Axel's progress as a gambler is all too predictable. And *The Gambler* has not much else to do, apart from doodling round its locations in the Central Park area, than see it through, all the way to the fall from even his own grace when pressure from the syndicate heavies forces Axel into bribing his favourite student basket-ball player to fix a game. Reisz plays this (overlong) penultimate sequence for straight melodrama: the game is also fixed dramatically, with a conventional parabola of synthetic suspense. In fairness, this is all the script allows him. Except to cap it all in a final scene, backed by orchestrated (!) ersatz Mahler, in which Axel gambles on death in a Harlem bar and is left contemplating in a mirror his victory scar. It is a scene which, like the film as a whole, is more than it needs to be but less than it might have been.

DAVID WILSON

Distant Thunder

'Over five million people in Bengal starved or died in epidemics because of the man-made famine of 1943.' This title appears over the final shot of Satyajit Ray's film—a quasi-expressionistic, rather Bergmanesque vision of silhouetted figures standing at the edge of a precipice, composing a line of seemingly endless breadth behind the camera's fateful retreat—and is clearly the crucial piece of information around which the preceding 100 minutes have been constructed. Yet the sheer immensity and horror of this unambiguous fact, essentially as unfilmable as it is unimaginable beyond the abstraction of statistics and other metaphors, can operate structurally only as a coda and 'footnote' to the rest of the discourse, even if it paradoxically comprises this discourse's *raison d'être*. Thus it is scarcely accidental that the visual rhetoric accompanying this conclusion is equally divorced and alienated from the remainder of *Distant Thunder* (Intercontinental Film Services)—an adaptation of a short story by Bibhut Bhusan Bannerji, author of the novel from which Ray's Apu trilogy was derived. Moving between fact and fiction, one is offered an illustration of both the strengths and the limitations of Ray's humanist art.

Apart from occasional newspaper headlines declaring the rise in prices and a few faded photographs depicting a more universal famine, the physical scope of the plot is restricted to one remote village and its immediate environs. It stretches no further than the fourteen miles walked one day by Gangacharan (Soumitra Chatterji), the Brahmin hero and religious-medical-pedagogical leader of the village, when he unsuccessfully attempts to sell some of his wife's bracelets for a few measures of rice. The 'War' as such figures visibly only as planes flying overhead. We hear their 'distant thunder' in the opening scene, when the hero's beautiful wife

Ananga (Babita) is bathing in the village pond, and gazes up at the 'flying ships' in innocent awe. 'How beautiful—like a flight of cranes,' she exclaims, gracefully assimilating this intrusion into a natural world whose fragile loveliness Ray has already established—with Soumendra Roy's splendid colour photography—in landscape tableaux behind the credits.

Ananga's response is emblematic of the fate of all the subsequent characters we encounter: to be destroyed without any clear understanding of what is happening or any power to change it. (Occasional rumours about the Japanese taking Singapore and 'our king'—in Gangacharan's phrase—'fighting the Germans and Japanese' are virtually the sum total of their knowledge about the reasons for the rising cost of rice; the hero appears only marginally more enlightened than the others because he thinks he knows approximately where Singapore is.) And Ray's response to this appalling tragedy is to focus on a few individuals' initial experience of it, seen principally from the vantage point of Gangacharan and Ananga.

Within their relatively protected world, the crisis registers first as a threat to caste and class—a scaled-down rural equivalent to the decline of the Magnificent Ambersons. And as with the Ambersons, this decline runs parallel to a certain moral growth. Beginning as a fairly diffident racketeer and village shaman mainly concerned with preserving his status, Gangacharan exudes complacency when he arrives in the village to propose starting a school. ('You are the jewel in our crown,' says one admiring villager, to which he replies, 'What is a crown without a head?'). It is only after he experiences the humiliation of Ananga husking rice in a low-caste house and sees women searching for pond snails to eat that his attitude towards the villagers starts to change: 'We live off them and that's wrong. If only we had land of our own.' And his grasp of Ananga's selfishness finally registers when she offers her bracelets for him to exchange for rice—so much so that after his trek proves fruitless and the rice owner insists that he stay for lunch, he finds himself unable to eat.

This latter scene, with all its delicate psychological shadings—Gangacharan lingering mournfully over scraps of food he doesn't know how to cook and feels ashamed to consume, while the rice owner's wife tries to console him

—is intercut with Ananga digging for wild potatoes with two friends, and suffering an attempted rape by a village outcast. Her cries—'significantly'—at first go unheard by her companions because of the planes passing overhead. Yet it is just this 'significance' that hints at a slight strain in Ray's rhetoric; a shift of tone even more evident in the melodramatic shots of the scarred rapist lurking in the woods' darkness, which suggests that serene pantheistic naturalism is ultimately inadequate to explain the enormity and importance of what is happening to these people.

Inadequate or not, Ray is able to carry it a considerable distance in the film's climactic sequence, before it gravitates into something else. Moti, a lower-caste friend of Ananga who visits her in the opening sequence ('Don't touch me now,' Ananga warns her amiably, 'I'd have to bathe again') reappears, on the verge of starvation, and collapses at the foot of a banyan. After Ananga is told feebly, 'Don't touch me—you'll have to bathe,' she runs off to give herself to the scarred rapist in exchange for some arum root to feed Moti, and lays it on the ground beside her. But Moti dies too weak to eat the food; Gangacharan arrives just before another starving girl makes off with the untouched arum roots, and when Ananga remarks that 'Jackals will come,' he promptly forgets Moti's status as an Untouchable and proposes cremating her.

At this point, an old man is seen approaching with his many 'dependants'—the same old man whom Gangacharan put up for the night at Ananga's insistence earlier in the film—and Ananga asks, 'What shall we do?' 'Well,' her husband notes philosophically, 'we'll be ten instead of two.' Ananga, reminding him of her recent pregnancy, adds: 'Eleven.' Silhouetted glimpses of the old man and his family shortly give way to other men and other families in the closing apocalyptic image and explanatory title.

Could Chekhov write an 'adequate' story about the victims of Hiroshima? As incongruous as the notion might sound, it is not entirely foreign to the problems faced by Ray in doing justice both to his characters and the plight that envelops them, to his awareness and their lack of awareness. Perhaps the key image in the film—it appears at least three times—is that of brightly coloured butterflies resting on a muddy patch of ground, flapping their wings but not

'The Gambler': Lauren Hutton, James Caan



rising: an image of beauty rather than one of shock, and not unlike Ray's appreciation of Ananga and her friends in their bright saris and playful moods. Politically committed by his theme to lodging an anguished protest, he seems much more assured and comfortable within the stylistic range of a stately elegy, and it is within these terms that *Distant Thunder* delivers its most lucid and devastating impact.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

The Front Page

It seems merely fortuitous that the National Theatre's successful revival of *The Front Page* should have led to thoughts of a film remake at a time when Billy Wilder and his screenwriting collaborator, I. A. L. Diamond, were looking for a property of this very type and vintage. It is, on the face of it, such a natural Wilder subject that he must surely have got round to it anyway, sooner or later.

Once an aspiring Hildy Johnson himself before he turned to film-making, Wilder would appear to agree about his rapport with the newspaper theme, demonstrated once before in his scathing attack on yellow journalism, *Ace in the Hole*. He maintains, in fact, that his *Front Page* (CIC) is the closest in spirit to the Hecht and MacArthur original; this despite a reworking of over half the dialogue, an 'opening out' of the script to take in various Chicago settings, and a ripening and updating of the carelessly profane language of the press room. His implication is that both Lewis Milestone and Howard Hawks, in their versions of 1931 and 1940 respectively, allowed sentimentality to get the better of cynicism. Hawks' decision to change Hildy Johnson's sex probably gives Wilder an additional shudder.

Superficially, at least, Wilder's claims to empathy with Hecht and MacArthur look reasonably sound. He has retained the 1929 settings—not always accurately but with energetic style—and has re-created the brittle, frenetic atmosphere which one supposes Twenties Chicago to have had. The ephemeral urgency of newspaper work is also convincingly conveyed, most notably in an opening montage which shows the presses printing and disgorging yet another sensational edition of the *Chicago Examiner*. Importantly, the main set—the press room in Chicago's Criminal Courts Building where the city's seven crime correspon-

dents await a morning hanging, gossiping and playing poker—is exactly as Hecht and MacArthur envisaged it: a bare, disordered place where 'reporters are drawn by an irresistible lure, the privilege of telephoning free.' And to the play's derisiveness and callous irony, Wilder has quite fittingly added his own unique brand of acid charm and vulgar cynicism, the latter characteristic being brilliantly encapsulated in an early shot of Walter Matthau, as the diabolical Walter Burns, standing in his sunlit office with a window reflection of the word 'Examiner' emblazoned across the seat of his pants. (Less acceptable, on the other hand, is Wilder's penchant for in-jokes, such as a reference to Ben Hecht going to Hollywood to write scripts for Rin-Tin-Tin; funny certainly, but irritating at the same time.)

Misgivings arise with Wilder's limited choice of pace—fast, noisy and strenuously unvarying, tending to coarsen a generally sharp-edged script—and with some of the casting and characterisations. Wilder is adamant that 'the best films in Hollywood have always been love stories between men,' and in his own films (particularly *Double Indemnity*, *Ace in the Hole*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Meet Whiplash Willie*, *Kiss Me, Stupid* and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*) the all-male relationship has often been stronger and more interesting than the male-female. Sensibly, therefore, he has kept the conflict between Walter Burns and Hildy Johnson—focusing on the obsessive Managing Editor's Machiavellian determination to sabotage his star reporter's marriage plans, to the accompaniment of a chorus of wisecracking reporters and kow-towing cops—as the most central of his themes.

Elsewhere, though, he has meddled to no good purpose, introducing two unnecessary additional characters (Dr. Eggelhofer, a crazy Viennese headshrinker, referred to but not seen in the original, and Rudy Keppler, a cub reporter who wets his trousers), turning the fastidious Bensinger into an ageing queen, reducing Austin Pendleton's condemned murderer from confused idealist to endearing nut, and allowing Carol Burnett to cut far too serious and abrasive a figure as noble tart Mollie Malloy. Even Jack Lemmon, perfectly attuned to his role as usual, displays too many familiar neurotic mannerisms to convince one that he is the ideal Hildy Johnson. Fortunately, Walter Matthau is Walter Burns, matching in every respect Hecht and MacArthur's description of him in one of those character-assassin-

ating author's asides which make *The Front Page* almost as entertaining to read as to see performed: '... an undignified Devil hatched for a bourgeois Hallowe'en ... that product of thoughtless, pointless, nerve-drumming immorality that is the Boss Journalist—the licensed eavesdropper, troublemaker, bombinator and Town Snitch.'

Where Wilder's film ultimately parts company with its model is in its lack of the warmth and affection which Hecht and MacArthur finally had to admit they could not conceal under their cynicism. 'It developed in writing this play,' they confessed in an epilogue to the playscript of *The Front Page*, 'that our contempt for the institution of the Press was a bogus attitude,' and went on to describe the result of their labours as 'a romantic and rather doting tale of our old friends—the reporters of Chicago.' Brooks Atkinson, doyen of New York theatre critics, endorsed this view. Writing in 1941, he said: 'Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, hardened from leg-work on Chicago newspapers ... had a relish for the alertness, cynicism, shrewdness, penury and exuberance of the working newspaper man and they missed none of it in the characterisations of their drama ... *The Front Page* is to journalism what *What Price Glory*? is to the marines—rudely realistic in style but romantic in its loyalties, and also audaciously profane.'

If this is a fair summing-up of Hecht and MacArthur's achievement, then it must be concluded that Wilder has concocted a *Front Page* that is undeniably funny but far removed from its pretensions. At least he hasn't stinted on the profanity.

CLYDE JEAVONS

The Four Musketeers

The decision to split Richard Lester's Musketeers epic straight down the middle (thus creating two box-office successes for the price of one) brought some consternation from the performers—'DOUBLE-TAKE STARS IN TWO-IN-ONE FILM SHOCK' screamed a *Sun* headline. But whatever the financial outcome, the aesthetic rewards of releasing both parts separately seem non-existent. *The Four Musketeers* (*The Revenge of Milady*), emerging after almost a year's intermission, is all too plainly half a film; we plunge into the action with characters and their milieu already established, and the poor fellow who never saw the first part will have much to unscramble. The cast and technical crew are almost identical, though Spike Milligan is absent (and is not missed) and the music is by Lalo Schiffrin, not Michel Legrand. The story continues after Richelieu's failed attempt to discredit the Queen at the masked ball; D'Artagnan's lover Constance is captured and spends most of the time slipping in and out of the Cardinal's clutches, before being peremptorily strangled by Milady de Winter with a rosary. The Cardinal tries to prevent Buckingham, the Queen's lover, from supporting the English rebels and sends Milady to plot his downfall; the Musketeers counteract by sending Planchet (seasick again), but his message is undelivered and Buckingham is stabbed at the quayside by his servant Felton (glimpsed briefly in *The Queen's Diamonds*). Rochefort encounters the Musketeers in varied locations and finally dies, stabbed in front of a convent lectern.

The two halves differ slightly in emphasis and structure. *The Revenge of Milady* (United Artists) has nothing to equal the glittering splendour of the masked ball and ultimately loses its momentum in a string of false endings—the final duel between D'Artagnan and Rochefort, followed by the confrontation between D'Artagnan and Richelieu, followed in turn by a brief résumé of D'Artagnan's past exploits. *Revenge* also has fewer bouts of sword-play, though the night duel from *The Queen's*

'*Distant Thunder*': Babita, Soumitra Chatterji



Diamonds finds a parallel in a perilous duel on an icy pond, and we are given a lengthy look at the religious wars, full of typical fooling. (The Musketeers take breakfast on the ramparts; gunfire opens the top of a wine bottle; a small spiked bomb is thrown at their feet and tossed back with a blow from a giant bread roll.) Yet on the whole there are fewer gags-for-gags'-sake, and some of the most striking are deployed purely for dramatic effect (a gambit which Lester explored more fully in *Juggernaut*). Constance is captured by a lone hand stretching out from a pile of melons in a market street; Milady, after slowly unrobing, dangles her foot in a tub full of blood.

But Lester's basic approach remains the same throughout both parts: *The Three and Four Musketeers* present a romantic adventure retold by a social historian with a penchant for the absurd. In writing his huge book, Dumas prided himself on 'elevating history to the dignity of the novel.' In Lester's hands the narrative loses its dignity, though its panache remains, and history is reinstated: the result is a quizzical analysis of French society in the 1620s. Much of the groundwork was covered in the early stretches of *The Queen's Diamonds* (the Musketeers' ruthlessly mercenary instincts, the simple methods of disposing of garbage and extracting teeth, the aristocrats' mindless pastimes), but Lester's camera and microphone continue to explore the curious behaviour of lackeys, lords and ladies. Buckingham enjoys an excursion in a primitive submarine, while four chair-bearers wade manfully through the water to reach him; returning from the religious wars, the Queen flusters around her dresses and complains of spending 'three weeks sneezing in the rain at La Rochelle'; tired sedan-carriers flex their arms, muttering 'She's put weight on!' and 'Why doesn't she get a horse?' as Milady flits up the staircase into her house. And on the fringe of all the Musketeers' exploits there is Roy Kinnear's Planchet, staggering about like a budgerigar's kelly, moaning that 'It's all right for some' after being given a particularly tall order by D'Artagnan.

Equally impressive is the film's visual design; with the aid of Brian Eatwell's sleekly decorated palaces, porticoes and props, Lester explores the camera-frame after the manner of his revered Buster Keaton, arranging humans and non-humans with geometric precision and grace and presenting most of the gags in single shots. At times, Lester's eye merely roams over the landscape, dwelling on one oddity after another. At the King's battlefield picnic on a hill slope a cluster of condemned men hang from a tree; a cleric's voice flatly commends them to God and a white-and-gold organ rotates upwards like a cinema organ rising from the pit; the Queen and her ladies saunter, eat, and pick flowers. In such scenes Lester demonstrates restraint and a coherent style—things one searched for in vain during his years as 'the Beatles' director'.

GEOFF BROWN

Flesh for Frankenstein and Young Frankenstein

To each his own nostalgia. For Paul Morrissey it is obviously the really tatty, rundown 1940s era of horror at Universal; for Mel Brooks it is the blissful dawn of James Whale. And nostalgia is the operative word—both *Flesh for Frankenstein* (EMI) and *Young Frankenstein* (Fox-Rank) are more complex in their attitudes than might at first appear. The aura is simple send-up—something a little more sophisticated, perhaps, but not essentially so different from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, with all the nasties played for easy laughs. But not a bit of it. Both films are at times very funny, but their humour is not parasitic, not even for the most part parodistic. They use characters and



'The Four Musketeers'

ideas from older movie versions of the old Mary Shelley warhorse as elements merely in the construction of something new and coherent and as personal to its creator as *The Rocky Horror Show* (soon to be seen as a third cinematic variation on the given theme).

Paul Morrissey's version is a film of great charm and uninhibited gusto. Obviously nobody connected with it took it very seriously, so it does have decided elements of parody, but at the same time they took it seriously enough, in the right way. At the first showing during last year's Los Angeles Filmex Monique Van Vooren said that while they were making the film everybody was roaring with laughter most of the time. Morrissey politely but firmly contradicted her: 'Nobody has a good time when you're filming.' And despite its eccentricities of casting and scripting—all of them obviously quite deliberate—it does come over as a serious film rather than just a bit of camp nonsense. It evidently springs from an almost childish delight in the most rubbishy kind of monster movie, an unaffected enjoyment of the silliest shock tactics of 3-D in the *House of Wax* era, and a cheery determination to do likewise.

Thus, though a lot of the film is quite funny—notably the scenes between the ravishing Baroness Frankenstein (whether Frankenstein's wife or sister remains unclear—perhaps both) and the new hired hand, played by Joe Dallesandro, and the dinner-table scene in which Joe recognises the head of his best friend, recently removed in a night attack, on the shoulders of Frankenstein's new mute 'guest'—at the same time, when it wants to pull the horror stops out as in the aforementioned decapitation scene, it proves perfectly capable of doing so. Visually the film is surprisingly elegant (like its non-3-D companion piece, *Blood for Dracula*, it has disconcerting moments which might by the look of them come right out of *The Leopard*); the improvisatory dialogue, delivered in a variety of incongruous and impenetrable accents, is more funny than revealing; and the gleeful dangle of bloody entrails in the face of the audience or the setting at us of some very palpably three-dimensional bats does make for a pleasurable gasp or two with absolutely no offence.

And yet, as with all Paul Morrissey's films, there remains something haunting and not totally accountable about the film and the way

it works on us. Perhaps the clue lies in his statement that he wants his actors to be sincere, though they can be light too. The special quality of *Flesh and Trash* comes from their absolutely level gaze at their human materials, however freaky these may be. People are accepted at their own valuation, according to their own definition, and there is no patronage or voyeurism. It now appears that Morrissey can carry over this same feeling to a pre-scripted fictional film, even one set in period and elsewhere than in America. All the actors do play with sincerity, even in the most absurd situations, with a gravity often born, one suspects, of their desperate struggles with the English language. When the film is funny it is not because anything is being deliberately played for laughs, but on the contrary because nothing is, because the characters of the story continue doggedly to cope seriously with the problems that an absurd (if not Absurd) universe throws at them. The dinner-table scene is funny, for instance, but only because the situation in which Joe finds himself is perfectly set up for a certain kind of ruthless social comedy in which horror can readily coexist with humour.

Mel Brooks' version, *Young Frankenstein*, is both less horrific and less humorous. Indeed, it is remarkably restrained considering that Brooks made it with the triumphant commercial success of *Blazing Saddles* under his belt; and that, it seems to me, gets across mainly by taking easy targets and bludgeoning them mercilessly until the last, dullest member of the audience must have seen the joke. The classic horror movie would seem to offer targets just as obvious. But evidently Brooks has more sympathy for it than he does for the Western, and a lot of the sympathy and enjoyment comes through. This time we are dealing with the story of the Baron Frankenstein's grandson, a humble, sane anatomy teacher who just wants to forget his family's reputation—until, that is, he arrives at the castle and falls under the spell of his grandfather's books and machines (the originals from James Whale's day).

The gags are nearly all of the very slowburn variety rather than the straight belly-laugh. The horses whinny and shy each time the housekeeper's name is mentioned, anywhere in the castle. Frankenstein (Gene Wilder) gets trapped, very slowly and inexorably, in the secret door leading to the laboratory, and has

to be as slowly extricated. His fiancée (Madeline Kahn) cannot be touched anywhere, at any time, for fear it will muss her hair, smudge her lipstick, crumple her dress. Igor (Marty Feldman) has a hump that moves from shoulder to shoulder between scenes, and cannot be questioned about it because he simply replies 'What hump?' The blind hermit (Gene Hackman) blithely sabotages the Monster by, all unaware, pouring scalding soup into his lap instead of his plate, smashing his wine goblet during a toast, and setting light to his thumb instead of his cigar. No good to describe, but perfect examples of the 'it was funny when he did it' syndrome. And the film itself, shot in black and white which has deliberately been given the grainy, faded quality of the average print of a horror classic as we now see them, has often an uncanny look of James Whale at his best. To appreciate *Young Frankenstein* fully, you have to be pretty well acquainted with his legitimate grandfather.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Sunset Across the Bay

After thirty-five working years, it's a toaster from the firm and retirement to a flat in Morecambe. This is the not very promising (in fact almost too well-worn) dramatic route, from the semi-detached towards the cemetery, traversed by Alan Bennett and Stephen Frears in *Sunset Across the Bay* (BBC TV). It says something for their confidence that they were prepared to put the austere but restrictive appeal of subfusc simplicity to work for them, in this autumnal north country companion piece to their earlier *A Day Out*.

Bennett is of course an artful writer, studding the slice of everyday with small plums of comic contrivance, scrupulous but canny both in his feeling for the pathos of limitation and his awareness of irony as the saving grace of English domestic dialogue. His ageing couple set out sturdily from Leeds, where they think they know where and what they are (the wife is more than affronted when men come to board up her old house against vandals, and she's told that she has spent her life in a slum) for alien Morecambe, where the neighbours are inquisitorial, the promenade windswept, and the milkman doesn't call on Sundays. Doggedly drifting, they embark on retirement as a kind of meaningless out of season holiday, trying out



'Flesh for Frankenstein': Udo Kier, Joe Dallesandro

the depressing pleasures of the old people's club and the pensioners' cheap afternoon at the pictures, sitting in sea-front shelters at the mercy of a garrulous lone widow with a glittering eye. The man (Harry Markham) keels over in a public lavatory, dying with the same quiet dejection as he had lived; the widow (Gabrielle Daye) is left to the kindness of strangers, and the solitary walks on the beach.

Frears and his adept cameraman, Brian Tufano, have a feeling for the built-in melancholy of the seaside in winter. As the woman waits outside the lavatory, nerving herself to ask a stranger to investigate, there are at least two time and light changes—dusk gathering, in an elegantly depressive forecast of a long evening. Earlier, as they leave Leeds by bus, there are bonfires by the roadside, demolition and rebuilding going on, a forbidding sense—backed by an almost throwaway line of dialogue—of lost landmarks vanishing under the motorways. Against the north country dialogue, with its flat acceptance and even flatter rejection of the unaccustomed, the way the film looks is of key

importance. It suggests something that little bit larger than the wry day-to-day exchange.

Some television critics have reviewed *Sunset Across the Bay* as a play. I'd call it essentially a film; which is perhaps simply more evidence that barriers are falling and that the descriptive differences are a matter of critical upbringing. It seems a film talent, however, that defines a script so closely in terms of place and lets a location do so large a share of the work. The old people's club, with its screech-owl singer and unctuous impresario, or the restaurant where a bored waiter condescends to a stumbling apology about spilt milk, are settings in which it's impossible not to feel out of place. These quick glimpses of varied locations allow Frears and Bennett to build their study on timing, the deflated reaction to yet another encounter that goes wrong. The result is an impression of something unusually four-square: life round the edges of the frame, the woe-begone comedy of making the best of what is almost always a bad job.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

BOOK REVIEWS

VISIONARY FILM: The American Avant-Garde

By P. Adams Sitney

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £8.00

P. Adams Sitney was included in recent criticism of New York's avant-garde film showcase, the Anthology Film Archives, the charge being that critics associated with Anthology (Sitney, Mekas and Michaelson) were using their virtual monopoly of the media, and Anthology's exclusive repertory policy, to promote a restricted

stable of film-makers. In this context, Sitney's book may be read as adding fuel to that fire. As the title suggests, he deals only with the American avant-garde, ignoring recent international achievements and including few (if any) film-makers that don't appear in Anthology's programmes.

But his reason is simple and sound. He has chosen to discuss only those films that he has viewed repeatedly, and over a period of years; a fact that explains his concentration on works completed

before 1969-70. This degree of intimacy and his restricted retrospective view leads Sitney to an interpretation of the thirty-year history in a much wider cultural context than most previous critics have attempted; and therein lies the book's achievement. To those of us who enjoyed the 'radical' status of the 'underground' film during the 1960s, Sitney's basic thesis may seem surprising: '... the preoccupations of the American avant-garde film-makers coincide with those of our post-Romantic poets and Abstract Expressionist painters. Behind them lies a potent tradition of Romantic poetics. Wherever possible, both in my interpretation of films and discussion of theory, I have attempted to trace the heritage of Romanticism.'

This romanticism appears at its most conspicuous in a theme that Sitney finds frequently recurring in the 'trance' film (Deren, Curtis Harrington, early Brakhage) and the 'mythopoeic' film (Markopoulos, Anger, later Brakhage);

that of the 'fall of unitary man into separate conflicting figures.'

The focus of the search is always within the protagonist; Sitney sees him initially in Maya Deren's work and the early psychodramas (of Anger, Markopoulos and Brakhage) as an extension of Cocteau's *Poète*, a somnambulist groping 'through a potent environment toward a climactic scene of self-realisation.' As the 'picaresque wanderer' (of Broughton and Nelson) he becomes more closely identified with the persona and vision of the film-maker, till in the 'lyrical' film (of later Brakhage and Baillie) it is the film-maker behind the camera who becomes the (unseen) first-person protagonist. 'The images of the film are what he sees, filmed in such a way that we never forget his presence and we know how he is reacting to his vision. In the lyrical form there is no longer a hero; instead, the screen is filled with movement, and that movement, both of camera and the editing, reverberates with the idea

of a man looking.' Sitney notes a parallel chronological shift from the Freudian imagery of the early psychodrama to a more Jungian vision embracing the notion of a collective unconscious, in the mythopoeia of Brakhage and Markopoulos. Thus literal references to archaic myth and mythological figures in *Pleasure Dome* give way to the invention of a new and essentially cinematic myth that Anger constructs round the Hell's Angels cult in *Scorpio Rising*.

Sitney links the pursuit of 'radical techniques as metaphors for perception and consciousness' with the romantic impulse to give priority to the imagination. From Anger and Peterson onwards, the 'indexical relationship between reality and the photographic image' that Deren had taken as a cornerstone of her art, becomes increasingly involved in a dialectical struggle with the desire to construct the film as a chain of inter-relating metaphors; Brakhage, and in a sense Belson, providing the final triumph of the latter.

The 19th century codes of perspective come in for particular attack. '[Brakhage] proceeds with a program for bringing the camera into the 20th century by distorting its lens, obliterating perspective, discarding the tripod, altering camera speeds, changing film stocks. He calls for these home-made modifications in the name of the eye, demanding of the filmmaker . . . a dedication to what he actually sees, not what he has been taught to see or thinks he should see.' And again, 'with his flying camera and fast cutting, and by covering the surface of the celluloid with paint and scratches, Brakhage drove the cinematic image into the space of Abstract Expressionism and relegated the conventional depth of focus to a function of the artistic will, as if to say "the deep axis will appear only when I find it necessary".'

The techniques described here contain in germinal form the subject-matter of more recent developments in the avant-garde; and the actual processes of film-making are beginning to take on the formal stance associated with structuralism. At this juncture, Sitney points out the degree of convergence between the two schools of the avant-garde, the trance/mythopoeic and the 'graphic' that has always been its alternative.

The graphic film, with its roots in Richter and Eggeling and the 'transitional' figure of Len Lye (Sitney denies Fischinger this position, wrongly in my opinion), is essentially involved in a dialogue between the rejection of the photographic illusion of depth and its replacement by 'virtual' depth, initially through drawing. Sitney appears relatively uninterested in the early abstract works (perhaps because they are distinctly non-romantic and don't fit his thesis), quickly moving on to construct his substantial analysis of Harry Smith's major work of mythopoeia, *The Magic Feature* (taking

in Max Ernst, Max Muller and others!). But the graphic cinema as he defines it also includes Robert Breer and Peter Kubelka, and though they too reject any notions of mythopoeia, the accent they place upon the single frame as the 'prime unit of cinema' (as opposed to the *shot* in narrative film) directly links them with the editing practices of Markopoulos, Anger and Brakhage.

The detailed focus by filmmakers upon the individual elements of the filmic fact leads Sitney to his most substantial hypothesis; he suggests that the avant-garde (since Deren) has increasingly been concerned with constructing a phenomenology of cinema, and that with Brakhage and particularly with Mike Snow, this ambition indeed becomes achievement. He goes on to propose that an 'unacknowledged aspiration of the American Avant-Garde has been the cinematic reproduction of the human mind,' an image-for-image mimesis of the flow of memory (in Markopoulos) or the condition of meditation (in the structural film). Sitney's highly evocative prose succeeds in carrying the argument, but the same passages reveal perhaps the only weakness of the book; his reluctance to involve himself in detailed description of the physical construction of the film. He allows himself to dodge the issue with an unchallengeable phrase like 'lengthy analysis diffuses the strength of rapid montage' and retreats to the home territory of his thematic studies.

But on home ground Sitney is unchallenged. The wealth of thought both in the studies on individual film-makers (particularly Deren and Brakhage) and the analyses of the major films of the movement (*Dog Star Man/The Art of Vision, The Magic Feature* and *Wavelength*) makes this the first book of real substance on this important area of cinema.

DAVID CURTIS

LIVING IMAGES

By Stanley Kauffmann

HARPER AND ROW, NEW YORK, \$11.95

In the introduction to *Figures of Light*, Stanley Kauffmann remarked: 'At the moment I'm still alive. I mention the fact a bit defiantly because an English reviewer of my first collection of film criticism expressed gratitude for James Agee's and Robert Warshow's posthumous collections but indicated that it was remiss of me to publish a collection while I was still alive, instead of writing a "real" book. And here I am offering a second collection without having had the decency to expire.'

He was referring to my review of *A World on Film* in this journal (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1967) when in the course of a largely favourable notice I suggested that he should have written an original book instead of doing a scissors-and-paste job. Well, in the time that has passed since then both of us have changed. I'm a trifle dis-

illusioned with original books on the cinema, and would rather read a collection of Kauffmann's elegant pieces addressed to the intelligent general readers of the *New Republic* than another volume on the ontology of the film or some such work. The day his new collection *Living Images* came into my hands I read a Marxist writer asserting that the prime job of the Marxist critic was to wage a relentless war on the bourgeois movie reviewers. This made the book doubly welcome, and the fact that Kauffmann is still alive something to rejoice in. He has seen committed criticism, auteur theorists and so on come and go; doubtless he'll survive neo-Marxism and semiology just as easily.

I can only repeat that I find him an intelligent and gifted writer, who brings to movie criticism a balanced view of life and a formidable knowledge of literature and the theatre as well as cinema. There are two respects, however, in which Kauffmann has changed. First he has mellowed without getting sentimental—gone are the gratuitous insults (albeit expressed with a waspish wit) that once marred his work. Secondly, I can no longer speak, as I did eight years ago, of 'his consistent lack of generosity, his virtual inability to discern merit in the American cinema, his reluctance to revise an opinion, his uncomprehending hostility to the star system.' Less embattled than Andrew Sarris, more stable than the ladies who share the film chores for the *New Yorker*, less bitter and didactic than John Simon, lacking the *Time* critics' need to sparkle line by line, Kauffmann is one of the best critics now at work in America.

Living Images contains a selection of 'Reviews' of new pictures (131 of them) from 1970 to the present—and the present reaches well into 1974, with pieces on pictures as recent as *Badlands*, *Thieves Like Us* and *The Last Detail*. Many of the most perceptive and favourable reviews are of American films; there are all sorts of wisdom, experience and insight involved in his 2,000 word piece on *Five Easy Pieces*, for instance. There are also eight longer 'Reviewings' of established classics.

The book concludes with two excellent essays which will no doubt get into movie anthologies, and probably already have. One, about the interchange between the American and the European cinemas over the past sixty years, was given as a university lecture last spring. The other is a series of notes comparing the experience of cinema and theatre (Kauffmann has also been a playwright, actor and drama critic), written in a precise, clipped, aphoristic style, e.g. 'The theatre works predominantly by building higher and higher in one place. The film, despite the literally vertical progress of the frames, works predominantly in lateral series of places'; 'Antonioni once told me that he had directed a few plays, and I asked him whether he

wanted to do more theatre work. "No," he said. "Always the same shot."'

There is a beautiful section on death in the cinema and theatre that I found not only perceptive but moving as well. 'Anyone who saw *Wild Strawberries* before Victor Sjöström died and saw it again afterwards knows that his performance, the whole film, took on an added poignancy and truth,' says Kauffmann, and he ends with these words: 'In the theatre, play scripts and photographs are souvenirs of productions, no more, if one happens to have seen the now-dead performers. In film, as TV movies demonstrate every night, inevitabilities laugh at us all.'

PHILIP FRENCH

THE MAGIC FACTORY

By Donald Knox

PRAEGER, NEW YORK, \$9.95

Donald Knox is a rarity among film historians, for he is an active director, working in television. He took some time off for research, joined the Oral History Department of the American Film Institute, and set out to study the workings of MGM. He selected one film, *An American in Paris*, and interviewed systematically everyone still alive who worked on it. And here Knox's film-making background shows itself, for he knows the value of the usually anonymous technicians—the set dressers, the script timer, the editor—and he allows them to talk with as much detail as director Vincente Minnelli or producer Arthur Freed. As a result, *The Magic Factory* is a film book of immense value; unlike many star biographies and critical analyses, it tells the truth. And although the picture was only made a matter of twenty-five years ago, each stage of the operation is carefully explained by the men and women who carried it out, as though they know their craft is dead.

Most film-makers find the *auteur* theory irritating, since it conflicts so often with their own experience. *The Magic Factory* might have put the theory to sleep once and for all, were it not for the publishers, who selected the *auteur* champion Andrew Sarris to write the foreword. He discovers to his dismay that Minnelli was not even on the set the whole time—having sneaked off to shoot another picture while the final ballet was set up. So he decides that the musical is 'the least amenable to directorial-auteurist analysis' and hints that the ultimate *auteur* should be George Gershwin's ghost.

MGM was a studio geared for producers, not directors. Executives ran it, and some pictures reached the public after going through six or seven directors. *An American in Paris* was the work of one director, but the result of an artistic collaboration. The exchange of skills is a profound personal problem, but MGM somehow induced a kind of tense altruism which enabled

one cameraman to stand aside, while another took over. And if that man was licked, a third would help the picture out. Plenty of resentment comes across in this story, and the art director found both Minnelli and Freed bafflingly inarticulate. But how they depended upon him! 'You threw a crumb to Vincente and he expected a banquet back.' And, of course, he got his banquet. MGM was the finest studio in the business, and if the money was there, so were the ideas. The dedication of the earlier days was still evident, despite union problems. Editor Adrienne Fazan, who had started her career in silent pictures, had her own way of dealing with the studio's rule that no overtime could be worked without permission. She worked the overtime, but didn't charge for it. 'What the hell,' she said. 'I'm working on a picture for the picture.'

Knox displays a similar dedication, for he has done as thorough a job as it is possible to do; having coaxed the information from hours of patient interviewing, he edits it skillfully, so that the interviews cut together like a film, and tell an absorbing story. The illustrations include sketches, cost sheets and inter-office memos. The publishers, however, have omitted an index, which is a major crime for a book of reference, and the photograph reproductions are not of a high standard.

After all the creative and administrative battles, and after *An American in Paris* has won virtually every Academy Award on offer, Knox fades in to the post-production comments. Nina Foch thinks the picture can't be taken seriously. 'It's a waste of serious work,' she says, 'not of course for a Vincente Minnelli or an Irene Sharaff, but for a serious actress. *An American in Paris*—what can I say to you?'

Gene Kelly, on vacation in Paris with Arthur Freed, has the idea of showing the film to Raoul Dufy—whose paintings had inspired some of the decor. 'Dufy was wheeled into the room by his nurse, for he was very old. Now Arthur and I were literally sweating with fear. After all, here we were, showing one of the great painters of the world our treatment of his work. Well, he just chortled; he was so pleased. After the house lights went up, he asked if we would show him the ballet again, which we joyously did. He thought we had all done a wonderful job.'

KEVIN BROWNLOW

REVOLUTIONARY SOVIET FILM POSTERS

By Mildred Constantine and Alan Fern

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$12.95/£6.50

'Our museums possess splendid collections of the Left art of the early post-revolutionary years,' wrote Ehrenburg in 1961. Adding laconically, 'It is a pity that these

collections are not on display. You cannot abolish a link in a chain.' The brilliant poster work created for the cinema by designers like the Stenberg Brothers, Nikolai Prusakov, Yakov Ruklevsky, as well as by the better remembered Alexander Rodchenko, is one of the most significant missing links in the story of modern graphic design; though whether its oblivion is due to the ideological suppressions of Soviet art history, or the general neglect that affects old film posters, is not certain.

A photographer, Caio Garruba, had the opportunity to photograph a whole collection of posters from the 1920s and early 1930s in Moscow; and the Johns Hopkins University Press does an inestimable service in publishing reproductions of some seventy-two of those which were created to advertise films. Mildred Constantine and Alan Fern make a brave show of linking the posters both to the Soviet cinema of the 1920s and to the general movements of modern art in Russia, where Futurism had early taken a hold, and already in 1913 Larionov had anticipated Constructivism and the heroic age of Soviet art: 'We declare: the genius of our days to be: trousers, jackets, shoes, tramways, buses, aeroplanes, railways, magnificent ships—what an enchantment—what a great epoch unrivalled in world history.'

The writers are, inevitably, handicapped by the endless mists of ignorance which still hang over most of the history of Russian and Soviet art. They are left to guess, for instance, that 'Art Nouveau philosophy and styles seem to have had very little impact,' and that posters before World War I were 'much less common, as far as we can tell, than they were in Europe or the United States.' I suspect they are wrong on both counts; and I know that they don't know the (quite considerable) difference between Trotsky and Kerensky, in their description of an October poster. Still they have given us the posters—a selection of some of the most original, truly revolutionary work, undating and unsurpassed, in the history of graphic design.

DAVID ROBINSON

THE COMPLETE WEDDING MARCH

By Herman G. Weinberg, for the American Film Institute

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY, BOSTON, \$19.95

The shade of Erich von Stroheim should be eternally grateful to Herman Weinberg; after the complete *Greed* comes another, even more lavish volume reconstructing both parts of *The Wedding March* in nearly 300 photographs, together with script extracts and a long introductory essay. This discursive, repetitive, sometimes irritating study of the conception, making and aftermath of Stroheim's great work triumphantly demonstrates that working your way all round a work of art is

sometimes the most useful way of getting well and truly into it. Compared with the new school of so-called 'analytical' writers, who dissect a film right down to the sprocket holes but who have neither the knowledge nor the culture to place it within a fully delineated social or artistic context, Weinberg's method must appear hopelessly personalised and quirky, yet what dividends it pays. The recollection of a shot, or part of a sequence, even an expression can set him off on a detailed speculation on what the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire really meant to Stroheim, the influence of Lehar and operetta on the traditions which Stroheim overthrew, the whole mystique surrounding 'Vienna', down to thoughts on how Stroheim might have taken to colour and sound and how he might have handled Schnitzler.

In fact, Weinberg makes the film so much his own and re-creates so much of it in his swooping prose that, even for those who have not seen it, the pictorial run-through can be relished as a series of stunning narrative paintings. All the famous scenes are here—the bordello, the cluttered bedrooms, the bower with its apple blossoms, the great set of the cathedral for the Corpus Christi celebrations (a pity that an approximation could not have been found for the glowing Technicolor seen in a recent NFT print).

Perhaps the most valuable part of the book, though, is the reconstruction of *The Honeymoon*, that battered torso which appeared briefly at the Cinémathèque many years ago and was then apparently destroyed in a fire. David Robinson, one of the few people in Britain to have seen it, has commented on its fragmentary nature. Certainly the illustrations here, with their cramped and slightly phoney-looking settings, together with the melodramatic scripting, suggest that the tribulations of production might have weakened Stroheim's creative urge. But, of course, this is pure conjecture. Robinson places certain episodes, like the abortive wedding night with poor Cecelia tearing up her nightgown in anguish, among Stroheim's finest moments; and the illustrations of Nicki's return to his former trysting place, only to find it deserted and overrun with ghostly cobwebs, have the authentic *angst* of a Mahlerian dying fall—as Weinberg might have it.

Weinberg calls his book a 'love-letter to a film'—certainly no motion picture has been approached with more relish or affection. After describing the fate of most of Stroheim's work, with the original material being slowly whittled down in the hands of one cutter after another, he comes up with the inevitable epitaph: '... he was the victim of his own *daemon*. Hollywood, the worst place to nurture his visions, was the only place that could afford them. Surely, the irony was not lost on him.'

JOHN GILLET

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *Badlands*, *California Split*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Night Moves*.

CIC for *The Gambler*, Brewster McCloud.

UNITED ARTISTS for *The Long Goodbye*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*.

FOX-RANK for *The Four Musketeers*.

UNITED ARTISTS/WALTER ALFORD for photographs of Vittorio De Sica.

ALLIED ARTISTS/COLUMBIA for *The Man Who Would Be King*.

EMI for *Flesh for Frankenstein*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Judex*.

CATHAY FILMS for *The Fate of Lee Khan*.

AMANDA FILMS for *Les Yeux sans visage*.

LAGOON/MIKE KAPLAN for *A Bigger Splash*.

INTERCONTINENTAL FILM SERVICES/ NEMAI GHOSH for *Distant Thunder*.

TWO ROADS PRODUCTION for *Royal Flash*.

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TERRA FILM for *L'Homme sans visage*.

FILMEL for *Thérèse Desqueyroux*.

FILMVERLAG DER AUTOREN for *Every Man for Himself*.

ELITE FILMS for *Mes Petites Amoureuses*.

TELEFILM, IRAN for *Prince Ehtejab*.

AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANIES for *Killer Bees*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Isn't It Shocking?*, *The Cat Creature*.

INCORPORATED TELEVISION COMPANY for *Brief Encounter*.

GRANADA TELEVISION for *Roll on Four O'Clock*, *Disappearing World* series.

LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION for *Bangelstein's Boys*.

ANTHONY MCCOLL for *Line Describing a Cone*.

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MARTHA HASLANGER for *Syntax*.

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Letters

Chaplin's Life

SIR,—In his review of *My Life in Pictures* by Charles Chaplin (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1974/75) Colin Ford quotes a comment on *Triple Trouble* in the filmography: 'Adapted by Essanay from a film that Chaplin had left unfinished called *Life*.' He goes on '*Life* is not mentioned in any other book that I know (including Chaplin's autobiography). Is it a new revelation? Or a mistake? A photograph later in the book is captioned: "*Work* (June 1915) was also known as *The Paper Hanger*, and the scene (left) was later included in *Triple Trouble* (1918)." That is certainly the usual version.'

The mention of *Life* is neither a mistake nor a revelation. It is true that Chaplin did not refer to it in *My Autobiography*, which is more concerned with his life than his films, but it occurs in almost every other study of his work with any pretensions to scholarship (Theodore Huff, Gerald D. McDonald *et al.*, Pierre Leprohon, etc. etc.). It was intended to be a full-length film, a social satire with a serious message (like his later films), but he abandoned it as Essanay wanted him to concentrate on his immensely successful two-reelers. Part of the footage was used in *A Night in the Show*, and a long sequence, set in a flophouse, was put by Chaplin into *Police*—but most of this was removed by Essanay before they released the film. *Triple Trouble* was a hodge-podge consisting partly of new material shot after Chaplin had left Essanay, largely of the flophouse sequence from *Life* (including some scenes that had remained in *Police*) and ending with a scene lifted straight out of *Work* (or *The Paper Hanger*).

Mr. Ford also points out a discrepancy between the filmography, which lists fifteen Essanay films, and a caption which gives the figure as sixteen. He suggests that both are wrong and that the true number is fourteen. In fact, the filmography is right: Chaplin has acknowledged *Triple Trouble* as his own film because of the original material it contained from *Life*.

Yours faithfully,

FRANCIS WYNDHAM

London, W.11.

SIR,—It is fairly common knowledge among film historians and particularly film collectors that Chaplin began work on a film called *Life* for Essanay in 1915. The film was to have been a serious feature but Chaplin abandoned it because of the ever-increasing demand for his short comedies at that time...

What is not so widely known is that the dosshouse sequences of *Life* were released on 9.5 mm by Film Office in Paris in the early 1960s for outright sale to collectors. The film was available as a one-reeler and prints were exported and were on sale to British collectors in London and elsewhere about 1963, though I cannot, at this distance in time, remember the exact title of this release print.

Yours faithfully,

BASIL COPPER

Sevenoaks, Kent.

Today We Live

SIR,—I do not want to prolong the controversy about Robert Vas' *Nine Days in '26* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1974). On the whole I agree with Jerome Kuehl that it is wrong to mix genuine historical material with other material which is also genuine but anachronous. However, as the only person who was present at all the slag-heap shooting for *Today We Live*, I must correct him on one point. Certainly *Today We Live* 'was made with the active collaboration of the Rhondda Valley miners whose lives it sought to portray,' and certainly three miners in particular 'turned themselves into actors,' but they did not need to do this 'to show how they had gleaned coal from the slag-heaps during the early years of the great slump.' In 1936 coal was still being gleaned daily from many dirt-heaps, and no re-enacting was necessary.

We filmed at three tips. Two were what I would call flat tips, the Cymmer tip above Porth, and the tip beside the main road north of Pontypridd. They were cold and windy and wet places, but the dirt was tipped from overhead buckets, and picking for coal was unpleasant but not particularly dangerous. The third tip was the monster on Cefn Gwyngul mountain, the eastern side of Rhondda Fach, which served Tylorstown and Ferndale Collieries. To the apex of this tip were drawn up huge hutchies of dirt, which cumulatively created a cone where the smallest pieces of stone and coal came to rest not very far down, and the largest boulders rampaged to the bottom.

It was difficult enough even to stand on, but every day when dirt was being tipped men waited in lines on either side of the movable steel channel which guided the black cloud of boulders and coal and dust, and ran forward into it to catch the precious coal before it disappeared under the next load. In one year two men had been killed, and there had been over a hundred more or less serious accidents. Having to concentrate on the action through the small viewfinder of an Eyemo, there was no possibility of seeing a really big boulder in time to avoid it, and I confess to having been as frightened on the two occasions I filmed there (for my first film in 1935, and for *Today We Live* in 1936) as ever I have been since.

Incidentally, how is it nobody



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understands that this tip could not have been filmed during the General Strike? There would have been no tipping of dirt if the pits had been on stop.

Yours faithfully,
DONALD ALEXANDER
The University, Dundee.

Brecht and the Film

SIR,—A few points arising from Martin Walsh's article on 'Brecht and the Film' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1974). (1) *The Three-penny Opera*. It is surely untenable to state that Pabst subverted Brecht's intentions in this film. Pabst merely took the parable and transferred it to the milieu in which he felt most at home, a cinematic milieu which had become alien to Brecht. The songs are so inserted into the film that they still act as comments on the action in the majority of cases—this is particularly true of the way in which 'Die Moritat von Mackie Messer' is handled. Further to this, the ending of Pabst's film, in which Peachum, Brown and Mackie sign contracts to seal the marriage of high finance and the exploitation of the poor, could scarcely be more unequivocal. The film was a compromise, but not nearly to the degree Mr. Walsh would have us believe.

(2) *Kuhle Wampe*, although it received its world premiere in Moscow, was not financed by a Russian company. It was initially financed by Prometheus G.m.b.H., a progressive film company known as the 'roter Filmverleih' (red film distributors). However, Prometheus' own backers stepped down when they realised the nature of the film. It was then completed with the aid of Praesens-Film, a Swiss-owned company which had just had a great success with a film about childbirth.

The film is by no means 'stylistically... conventional': its style is largely borrowed from the (roughly) contemporary Soviet cinema, the influence of Eisenstein (whom Dudow had met) being particularly evident. It is certainly the one and only truly 'Brechtian' film in existence—the mode of acting could have been developed by nobody else. The players—all amateurs, except for Ernst Busch and Hertha Thiele—manage to act their parts in a dry, distanced tone, rather as if they were giving a lecture; this technique achieving precisely what Brecht intended, that is, to throw the idea-content of the film into clear relief. The cuts, by the way, do not affect the film to a very great extent.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL L. VAWDREY
Crewe, Cheshire.

Top Ten

SIR,—Admittedly, annual Ten Best lists are closer to a kind of sport than a critical seminar; but they do have their polemical points, and as long as one indulges in the game, one might as well try to play it seriously. For this reason, I think it is worth clarifying that the Ten Best lists appearing in the Winter

issue of SIGHT AND SOUND are chosen from a master list of films which became available for public screening in Britain over the preceding year.

Regrettably, an oversight excluded Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale* from my list of choices, and consequently I failed to include a film which I would certainly rank higher than most or all of the titles I did include. Similarly, the non-eligibility of various new films programmed at the NFT necessitated other exclusions; otherwise, *Out 1: Spectre, Céline et Julie vont en Bateau, Lancelot du Lac* and *Martha* would surely have figured among my selection.

Yours faithfully,
JONATHAN ROSENBAUM
London, NW3

Adventures with D. W. Griffith

SIR,—To write about films can be more profitable today than to make them. Yet some film books are suffering the fate of certain fine films which are denied proper exhibition. One example is *Adventures with D. W. Griffith*, by Karl Brown. Publishers' exploitation being even less effective than film exploitation, few people seem aware of the book. Some confuse it with the book by Billy Bitzer. Karl Brown was Bitzer's assistant on *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*; he was still in his teens, and his sense of observation was at its most acute. He brings the period alive, and his characterisation of D. W. Griffith is among the best writing in film literature.

It would be tragic if this book were a financial failure, for it would discourage the publication of a second volume—dealing with Famous Players-Lasky, the Arbuckle scandal, *The Covered Wagon* and *Stark Love*. If no one else will advertise *Adventures with D. W. Griffith*, I feel obliged to do so myself. It is incredibly funny, apart from being the most accurate and perceptive volume of reminiscence on the cinema. (An extract appeared in the Summer 1973 issue of SIGHT AND SOUND.) It costs £4, is illustrated with very rare stills, and is published by Secker and Warburg.

Yours faithfully,
KEVIN BROWNLOW
London, S.W.7.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID HANCOCK is a documentary producer and cameraman... PAUL MADDEN is Television Officer of the National Film Archive... VLADIMIR PETRIC is a visiting professor in film studies at Harvard, on leave from the Belgrade Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television. Has been film critic for the Belgrade daily *Politika* and has directed and acted in film and television... JONATHAN ROSENBAUM is now assistant editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*... MICHAEL TARANTINO is a graduate in Cinema Studies from New York University, and has written for *Take One* and *Movietone News*.

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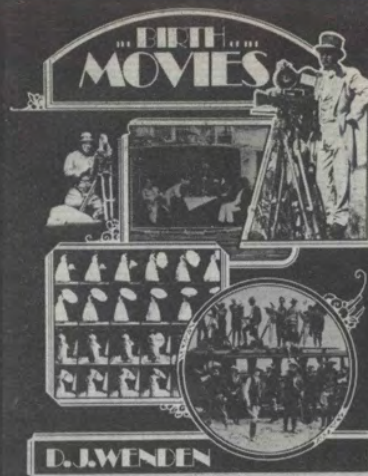
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A potpourri of film clips ranging from the early 1900s to the 1940s that etches a casual history of women on display, in blue movies, newsreels and other kinds of period footage. Too campy for comfort in spots, but the musical segments—by Fats Waller, Meade Lux Lewis and George Formby, among others—provide wonderful breathers. (Directors, Peter Neal, Anthony Stern.)

AIRPORT 1975 (CIC)

All aboard for another entry in the topical disaster stakes, this time more chaos in the cockpit. The stars take a back seat, though Charlton Heston is on hand to rescue the Boeing with a hole in its side. (Karen Black, George Kennedy, Efram Zimbalist Jr.; director, Jack Smight.)

ALFIE DARLING (EMI)

Bill Naughton's character on the rampage in a colour supplement world where even Wapping is chic; Alan Price tries hard to inject a touch of reality but is defeated by Ken Hughes' determinedly crass script and direction. (Jill Townsend, Paul Copley, Joan Collins.)

*ARABIAN NIGHTS (United Artists)

The final part of Pasolini's 'trilogy of life' turns out to be the best: drawing equally on its source's realism and magic, its panorama of the manners and dreams of a vanished culture exists in an eternal present of wit, eroticism and wonder. (Ninetto Davoli, Ines Pellegrina, Franco Citti.)

*BIGGER SPLASH, A (Lagoon)

A fantasy in the form of a documentary about David Hockney, his paintings, and the sexual-emotional life presumably taking place between the two. Lushly photographed by director Jack Hazan in clean compositions closely paralleling Hockney's work. *Reviewed.*

*BLACK HOLIDAY (The Other Cinema)

Attractively muted drama of politics and conscience, set in an island detention centre for opponents of the Mussolini regime. The hero, a donnish anti-fascist, finally rejects the special relationship offered him by the governor, and the film tempers didacticism with adult irony. (Adolfo Celi, Adalberto Maria Merli; director, Marco Leto.)

*BRING ME THE HEAD OF ALFREDO GARCIA (United Artists)

Magnificently Gothic Western about a down and out piano-player (Warren Oates) who tries to recoup his fortunes by becoming a bounty-hunter, and in so doing finds himself pursued unto madness by the furies of his own self-destructiveness. Sam Peckinpah at his best. (Isela Vega, Gig Young, Robert Webber.) *Reviewed.*

*BROTHER CAN YOU SPARE A DIME (VPS)

A fable from the Great Crash to Pearl Harbour, as seen by the movies. A collage compilation, somewhat indiscriminately welding Hollywood and newsreel to the

detriment of some fascinating material. (Director, Philippe Mora.)

DEATH WISH (CIC)

Michael Winner's sociological thesis on the urban hell of Fun City has about as much substance—and the same roughly pasted-together style—as the past confrontations with straw villains he has arranged for stone killer Charles Bronson. (Hope Lange, Vincent Gardenia.)

**DISTANT THUNDER

(Intercontinental Film Services) Satyajit Ray's depiction of the Bengal famine of the early Forties views this wartime crisis, in which over 5 million people perished, on a strictly local basis. Shot in brilliant colour, with a fine sense of psychological nuance charting the moral awakening of a village chieftain, and a lyrical grasp of natural beauty in the midst of imminent apocalypse. (Soumitra Chatterji, Babita.) *Reviewed.*

*DOCTOR IN THE NUDE, THE (Antony Balch)

Alain Jessua's disappointingly thin *Traitement de Choc*. Dr. Alain Delon runs a clinic rejuvenating France's Top People with sinister injections; Annie Girardot, in between romps on bed and beach with said doctor, discovers why the Portuguese servants seem to be turning into bloodless zombies. The horrors are marginally more appealing than the Social Significance.

**EXTREME CLOSE-UP

(Scotia-Barber) Not unintelligent little film (rather overtaken by *The Conversation*, though made in 1972) about a TV reporter, assigned to a series about the legal and moral implications of electronic surveillance, who finds himself becoming hooked on the pleasures of peeping. Good script by Michael Crichton, flawed by superficial characterisation. (Jim McMullan, Kate Woodville; director, Jeannot Szwarc.)

*FATE OF LEE KHAN, THE (Cathay)

A real surprise from the Hong Kong cinema: King Hu's political fable (about the resistance movement in Mongol-occupied China) turns out to be as nuanced, witty and stylish as vintage Hollywood comedy. Succulently performed, designed and shot, it's by turns historical thriller and feminist satire. (Li Li-Hua, Hu Chin, Angela Mao.) *Reviewed.*

*FLAME (VPS)

Stardust revisited, as the pop group Slade goes through the motions of satirising the rise and fall of a group not unlike themselves. Fairly sharp vignettes of the seedier side of the business; less persuasive about the exploitation of success. (Tom Conti, Johnny Shannon; director, Richard Loncraine.)

*FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN (EMI)

Still groping for a form to structure the freakshow casting and improvised dialogue left over from his days with Warhol, Paul Morrissey has triumphantly discovered the horror genre and tried to exploit and parody it at once. Now that the British censor has removed most of the visceral excesses, the result looks even more impoverished than *Heat*. (Udo Kier, Monique Van Vooren, Joe Dallessandro.) *Reviewed.*

FLESH GORDON (Variety)

The Universal serials revisited with plot and characters spruced up for the Salacious Seventies (Dr. Zarkov appears as Dr. Jerkoff, the planet Mongo becomes the planet Porno, etc.); special effects are an advance on the originals, but the makers' sense of

humour is moronic. (Jason Williams, Suzanne Fields, John Hoyt; directors, Howard Ziehm, Michael Benveniste.)

**FOUR MUSKETEERS, THE (Fox-Rank)

More of the same from Richard Lester, though the humour is less forced and the spectacle less spectacular as Faye Dunaway's Milady takes the centre stage, inveigling D'Artagnan and Buckingham into her web of revenge. Beautiful to look at, and constantly invigorating. (Michael York, Oliver Reed, Frank Finlay, Charlton Heston.) *Reviewed.*

**FRONT PAGE, THE (CIC)

Billy Wilder's resolutely raucous version of the Hecht-MacArthur play about the wiles of Chicago pressmen. Classic performance by Walter Matthau as the machinating editor; otherwise, a shade inflexible in its determination to keep fast and funny. (Jack Lemmon, Carol Burnett.) *Reviewed.*

GAMBLER, THE (CIC)

Karel Reisz passively accepts that James Toback's script about the evils of gambling has a message to deliver about its masochistic, self-destructive hero—and does little to cushion it by adding any flavour to the ethnic scenes of family reckoning or the sessions round the gaming tables. (James Caan, Lauren Hutton, Paul Sorvino.) *Reviewed.*

**LIFE OF OHARU, THE

(Cinegate) The first of Kenji Mizoguchi's late masterpieces, made the year before *Ugetsu Monogatari*, chronicling the persecutions of a woman in feudal 17th and 18th century Japan. Probably the most powerful of all the director's feminist protests, combining picaresque plot with magisterial *mise-en-scène*. (Kinuyo Tanaka, Toshiro Mifune.)

**LITTLE MALCOLM

(Multicenter) Careful adaptation of David Halliwell's play about a North Country art student who dreams his petty rebellion against authority into a Hitlerian *Götterdämmerung*. Lovely performances and the dialogue is a treat, but Little Malcolm's burrowing, blinkered fantasy doesn't quite survive translation from the play's single, claustrophobic set. (John Hurt, John McEnery, David Warner; director, Stuart Cooper.)

MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN, THE (United Artists)

The Bond cycle limps on, lacking suspense as well as style, as Roger Moore goes blandly through the motions of an indifferent script. Locations range from Beirut to Macao, if it matters, and only Christopher Lee's villain adds a touch of class. (Britt Ekland, Maud Adams; director, Guy Hamilton.)

*MASTER AND MARGARITA, THE (Nationwide)

Yugoslav version of Mikhail Bulgakov's retrospectively ironic novel about literature and the state in 1920s Moscow. Impressive special effects, particularly when the Devil and his cat are working their black magic, but misses much of the original's surrealist sting. (Ugo Tognazzi, Mimsy Farmer, Alain Cuny; director, Aleksandar Petrović.)

**PHANTOM OF LIBERTÉ, THE

(Fox-Rank) Buñuel's brilliant companion piece to *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, using the same technique of interrupted narrative. But this time the humour is darker and the lacunae more cavernous, giving the film precisely the same minatory charge as *L'Age d'Or*. (Jean-Claude Brialy, Monica Vitti, Michel Piccoli.)

*PRISONER OF SECOND AVENUE, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Characteristic Neil Simon comedy, with Jack Lemmon and Anne Bancroft in good form as the couple both being driven mad (though not at the same time) by the pressures of living in New York. Melvin Frank's direction is slick but heedless of the emotional subtleties lurking behind the flow of witty lines. (Gene Saks, Elizabeth Wilson.)

SPIRAL STAIRCASE, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Since Siodmak's 1946 version we've had a glut of neurotic families living in isolated houses, and Peter Collinson wrings only the obvious thrills from an obvious plot line. Jacqueline Bisset, as the girl who lost her voice in a ghastly accident, suffers beautifully while a black-gloved murderer prowls amid frequent thunderclaps. (Christopher Plummer, Elaine Stritch, John Phillip Law, Gayle Hunnicutt.)

**TOMMY (Hemdale)

Ken Russell's noisy annotations on The Who's rock opera about a deaf, dumb and blind boy who becomes a pinball machine king and the leader of a cult. By turns startling and grotesque, inventive and banal; in other words, the Russell mixture as before. (Roger Daltrey, Oliver Reed, Ann-Margret.)

*TOWERING INFERNO, THE

(Columbia-Warner) Panic stations in the world's tallest tower block, as fire engulfs the building and the stars at the penthouse party battle for survival. Statutory thrills and spectacular special effects make for an eerily effective slice of escapist hokum. (Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, William Holden, Faye Dunaway; director, John Guillermin.)

*TRUCK STOP WOMEN

(Antony Balch) As stylised as Fassbinder, and as full of Fifties' Hollywood motifs, this rampage through an all-American hinterland of trucking, gang warfare and homely sex and violence emerges as the most riotously funny B-movie since Corman retired. Writer-director Mark L. Lester doesn't miss a cliché. (Lieux Dressler, Claudia Jennings, Dennis Fimple.)

*VALLEY OBSCURED BY CLOUDS, THE (Lagoon)

Journey to the centre of a cliché, with a French consular wife joining assorted love children in their quest for Eden in uncharted New Guinea. Nestor Almendros' landscape photography helps, but director Barbet Schroeder's frantic equivocations are really only vindicated by his excellent cast. (Bulle Ogier, Jean-Pierre Kalfon, Michael Gothard.)

WILBY CONSPIRACY, THE (United Artists)

A political thriller which scores its points off the fascist policies of South Africa in glib, comedy-adventure style, while galloping through the twists and turns of its plot like an old radio serial. (Sidney Poitier, Michael Caine, Nicol Williamson; director, Ralph Nelson.)

*YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN

(Fox-Rank) Lovingly evocative photography by Gerald Hirschfeld; two delightful sequences in the Monster's encounter with the Hermit and the Little Girl (with Karloff at last finding a worthy heir in Peter Boyle). Otherwise, in Mel Brooks' notion of parody, anything goes almost as desperately as in *Blazing Saddles*. (Gene Wilder, Marty Feldman.) *Reviewed.*

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